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Plays of Near and Far

By LORD DUNSANY

The Compromise of the King of
the Golden Isles—The Flight of
the Queen—Cheezo—A Good
Bargain—If Shakespeare Lived
To-day—Fame and the Poet

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PREFACE TO AMERICAN EDITION

BELIEVING plays to be solely for the stage, I have never before allowed any of mine to be printed until they had first faced from a stage the judgment of an audience, to see if they were entitled to be called plays at all. A successful production also has been sometimes a moral support to me when some critic has said, as for instance of "A Night at an Inn," that though it reads passably it could never act.

But in this book I have made an exception to this good rule (as it seems to me), and that exception is "The Flight of the Queen." I know too little of managers and theatres to know what to do with it, and have a feeling that it will be long before it is ever acted, and am too fond of this play to leave it in obscurity. This beautiful story has been lying about the world for countless centuries, without ever having been dramatized. It is the story of a royal court, which I have merely adapted to the stage. The date that I have given is accurate; it happened in June;

PREFACE

and happens every June; perhaps in some corner of the reader's garden. It is the story of the bees.

As for "The Compromise of the King of the Golden Isles," it is just the sort of play through which those that hunt for allegories might hunt merrily, unless I mention that there are no allegories in any of my plays.

An allegory I take to be a dig at something local and limited, such as politics, while outwardly appearing to tell of things on some higher plane. But, far from being the *chef d'œuvre* of some ponderously profound thinker, I look on the allegory, if I have rightly defined it, as being the one form of art that is narrowly limited in its application to life. When the man whose cause it championed has been elected alderman, when the esplanade has been widened, or the town better lighted or drained, the allegory's work must necessarily be over; but the truth of all other works of art is manifold and should be eternal.

Though there is no such land as the Golden Isles and was never any such king as Hamaran, yet all that we write with sincerity is true, for we can reflect nothing that we have not seen, and this we interpret with our

PREFACE

idiosyncracies when we attempt any form of art.

I set some store by the way in which the three lines about Zarabardes are recited, though it is hard to explain in writing a matter of rhythm. But the heartlessness of it can be indicated by a clear pronunciation of the syllables, as though the people that utter these words had long been drilled in a formula.

The third play, "Cheezo," tells of one of those rare occasions when it is permissible for an artist, and may be a duty, to leave his wider art in order to attack a definite evil. And the invention of "great new foods" is often a huge evil.

"Cheezo" is a play of Right and Wrong, and Wrong triumphs. Were not this particular wrong triumphing at this particular date I should not have thought it a duty to attack it, and were it easily defeated it would not have been worth attacking.

I have seen it acted with a Stage Curate, rather weak and a little comic; obviously such a man could be no match for Sladder. Hippanthigh should be of stronger stuff than that: he is defeated because that particular evil is, as I have said, defeating its enemies at present. Nor could there be any drama in a contest between the brutal Sladder and a

PREFACE

Stage Curate; for the spark that we call humour, by whose light we see much of life, comes as it were of two flints, and not of a flint and cheese.

The three little plays at the end of the book I will leave to speak for themselves, as ultimately all plays have to do.

DUNSANY.

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THE COMPROMISE OF
THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES: KING
HAMARAN.

THE KING'S POLITICIAN.

THE AMBASSADOR OF THE EMPEROR.

THE EMPEROR'S SEEKER.

TWO PRIESTS OF THE ORDER OF THE SUN.

THE KING'S QUESTIONERS.

THE AMBASSADOR'S NUBIAN.

THE HERALD OF THE AMBASSADOR.

THE EMPEROR'S DWARF.

THE DEPUTY CUP-BEARER.

THE KING'S DOOM-BEARER.

THE COMPROMISE OF THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

THE KING'S POLITICIAN

A man has fled from the Emperor, and has taken refuge in your Majesty's Court in that part of it called holy.

THE KING

We must give him up to the Emperor.

POLITICIAN

To-day a spearsman came running from Eng-Bathai seeking the man who fled. He carries the barbed spear of one of the Emperor's seekers.

KING

We must give him up.

POLITICIAN

Moreover he has an edict from the Emperor demanding that the head of the man who fled be sent back to Eng-Bathai.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING

Let it be sent.

POLITICIAN

Yet your Majesty is no vassal of the Emperor, who dwells at Eng-Bathai.

KING

We may not disobey the Imperial edict.

POLITICIAN

Yet——

KING

None hath dared to do it.

POLITICIAN

It is so long since any dared to do it that the Emperor mocks at kings. If your Majesty disobeyed him the Emperor would tremble.

KING

Ah !

POLITICIAN

The Emperor would say, "There is a great king. He defies me." And he would tremble strangely.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING

Yet—if——

POLITICIAN

The Emperor would fear you.

KING

I would fain be a great king—yet——

POLITICIAN

You would win honour in his eyes.

KING

Yet is the Emperor terrible in his wrath.
He was terrible in his wrath in the olden
time.

POLITICIAN

The Emperor is old.

KING

This is a great affront that he places upon
a king, to demand a man who has come to
sanctuary in that part of my Court called
holy.

POLITICIAN

It is a great affront.

[*Enter the SEEKER. He abases himself.*]

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

SEEKER

O King, I have come with my spear, seeking for one that fled the Emperor and has found sanctuary in your Court in that part called holy.

KING

It has not been the wont of the kings of my line to turn men from our sanctuary.

SEEKER

It is the Emperor's will.

KING

It is not *my* will.

SEEKER

Behold the Emperor's edict.

[*The KING takes it. The SEEKER goes towards the door.*]

SEEKER

I go to sit with my spear by the door of the place called holy.

[*Exit SEEKER.*]

KING

The edict, the edict. We must obey the edict.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

POLITICIAN

The Emperor is old.

KING

True, we will defy him.

POLITICIAN

He will do nothing.

KING

And yet the edict.

POLITICIAN

It is of no importance

KING

Hark! I will not disobey the Emperor. Yet will I not permit him to abuse the sanctuary of my Court. We will banish the man who fled from Eng-Bathai. [*To his DOOM-BEARER.*] Hither, the Doom-Bearer; take the black ivory spear, the wand of banishment, that lies on the left of my throne, and point it at the man that shelters in the holy place of my Court. Then show him the privy door behind the horns of the altar, so that he

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

go safely hence and meet not the Emperor's seeker.

[The DOOM-BEARER bows and takes the spear on the flat of both his hands. The shaft is all black, but the head is of white ivory. It is blunt and clearly ceremonial. Exit.]

To POLITICIAN.]

Thus we shall be safe from the wrath of the Emperor, and the holy place of my Court will not be violate.

POLITICIAN

Had your Majesty scorned the Emperor it were better. He is old and durst not take vengeance.

KING

I have decided, and the man is banished.

[A HERALD marches in and blows his trumpet.]

HERALD

The Ambassador of the Emperor.

[Enter the AMBASSADOR. He bows to the King from his place near the door.]

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING

For what purpose to my Court from Eng-Bathai comes thus the Ambassador of the Emperor?

AMBASSADOR

I bring to the King's Majesty a gift from the great Emperor [AMBASSADOR *and his men bow*], who reigns in Eng-Bathai, the reward of obedience to his edict, a goblet of inestimable wine.

[He signs and there enters a page bearing a goblet of glass. He has a pretty complexion and yellow hair falling as low as his chin and curling inwards. He wears a cerise belt round his tunic exactly matching the wine in the goblet he carries.]

He prays you drink it, and to know that it was made by vintners whose skill is lost, and stored in secret cellars over a hundred years; and that the vineyards whence it came have been long since whelmed by war, and only live now in legend and this wine.

KING

A gift, you say, for obedience.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

AMBASSADOR

A gift from the old wine-gardens of the sun.

KING

How knew the Emperor that I had thus obeyed him?

AMBASSADOR

It has not been men's wont to disobey the Emperor.

KING

Yet if I have sheltered this man in the holy place of my Court?

AMBASSADOR

If that be so the Emperor bids you drink out of this golden goblet [*He signs and it is brought on by a bent and ugly dwarf*] and wishes you farewell.

KING

Farewell, you say?

AMBASSADOR

Farewell.

KING

What have you in the goblet?

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

AMBASSADOR

It is no common poison, but a thing so strange and deadly that the serpents of Le-butharna go in fear of it. Yea, travellers there hold high a goblet of this poison, at arms' length as they go. The serpents hide their heads for fear of it. Even so the travellers pass the desert safely, and come to Eng-Bathai.

KING

I have not sheltered this man.

AMBASSADOR

There is no need then for this Imperial gift.

*[He throws the liquid out of the goblet
through the doorway on to the marble.
A great steam goes up.]*

KING

Neither have I ordered that his head be sent back to Eng-Bathai.

AMBASSADOR

Alas, for so rare a wine.

[He pours it away.]

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING

I have banished him and he is safe. I have neither obeyed nor disobeyed.

AMBASSADOR

The Emperor therefore bids you choose the gift that he honours himself by sending to your Court.

[He signs. Enter a massive NUBIAN with two cups.]

The Emperor bids you drink one of these cups.

[The huge NUBIAN moves up close to the KING holding up the two cups on a tray.

The POLITICIAN slinks off. Exit L.]

KING

The cups are strangely alike.

AMBASSADOR

Only one craftsman in the City of Smiths ever discerned a difference. The Emperor killed him, and now no one knows.

KING

The potions also are alike.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

AMBASSADOR

Strangely alike. [*The KING hesitates.*]
The Emperor bids you choose his gift and
drink.

KING

The Emperor has poisoned the cups!

AMBASSADOR

You greatly wrong the Emperor. Only
one cup is poisoned.

KING

You say that one is poisoned?

AMBASSADOR

Only one, O King! Who may say which?

KING

And what if I refuse to do this thing?

AMBASSADOR

There are tortures that the Emperor never
names. They are not spoken of where the
Emperor is. Yet the Emperor makes a sign
and they are accomplished. He makes the
sign with a certain one of his fingers.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING [*half to himself*]

How wonderfully they have the look of wine.

AMBASSADOR

One is a wine scarcely less rare, scarcely less jubilant in the wits of man, than that which alas is lost.

[He glances towards the spot where he threw the other.]

KING

And the other?

AMBASSADOR

Who may say? It is the most treasured secret that the Emperor's poisoners guard.

KING

I will send for my butlers that are wise in wine and they shall smell the cups.

AMBASSADOR

Alas, but the Emperor's poisoners have added so wine-like a flavour to their most secret draught, that no man may tell by this means which is their work and which that inestimable wine.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING

I will send for my tasters and they shall taste of the cups.

AMBASSADOR

Alas, so great a risk may not be run.

KING

Risks are the duty of a king's tasters.

AMBASSADOR

If they chanced to taste of the treasure of the Emperor's poisoners—well. But if they, or *any* man of common birth, were to taste of the wine that the Emperor sends only to kings, and even to kings but rarely, that were an affront to the Emperor's ancient wine that could not be permitted.

KING

It is surely permitted that I send for my priests, who tell by divination, having burnt strange herbs to the gods that guard the Golden Isles.

AMBASSADOR

It is permitted.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING

Send for the priests.

KING [*mainly to himself*]

They shall discern. The priests shall make for me this dreadful choice. They shall burn herbs and discern it. [*To AMBASSADOR.*] My priests are very subtle. They worship the gods that guard the Golden Isles.

AMBASSADOR

The Emperor has other gods.

[*Enter L. two priests of the Order of the Sun. Two acolytes follow. One carries a tripod and the other a gong.*

The priests abase themselves and the acolytes bow. The AMBASSADOR stands with almost Mongolian calm by the door from which he has not moved since he entered.

The impassive NUBIAN stands motionless near the KING holding up the cups on a tray.]

KING

The Emperor has honoured me with these two cups of wine that I may drink one of them to the grandeur of his throne. I bid

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

you importune the gods that they may surely tell me which it were well to drink.

FIRST PRIEST

We will importune the gods with the savour of rarest spices. We will send up to them the odour of herbs they love. We will commune with them in silence and they shall answer our thoughts when they snuff the savour of the smoke of the burning on the tripod that is sacred to the Sun.

[The calm of the AMBASSADOR and the impassivity of the NUBIAN grow ominous. The two priests hang over the tripod. They cast herbs upon it. They pass their hands over it. The herbs begin to smoulder. A smoke goes up. The priests bend over the smoke. Presently they step back from it.]

FIRST PRIEST

The gods sleep.

KING

They sleep! The gods that guard the Golden Isles?

FIRST PRIEST

The gods sleep.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING

Importune them as never before. I will make sacrifice of many sheep. I will give emeralds to the Monks of the Sun.

[The second acolyte moves nearer to the tripod and beats listlessly on his great gong at about the pace of a great clock striking slowly.]

FIRST PRIEST

We will importune the gods as never before.

[They heap up more herbs and spices. The smoke grows thicker and thicker. It streams upwards. They hover about it as before. At a sign the gong ceases.]

The gods have spoken.

KING

What is their message?

FIRST PRIEST

Drink of the cup upon the Nubian's left.

KING

Ah. My gods defend me.

[He seizes the cup boldly. He looks straight at the AMBASSADOR, whose face remains expressionless, merely watching.]

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

He lifts the cup upon the Nubian's left a little up from the tray.

He glances towards the priests.

Suddenly he starts. He has seen a strange expression upon the face of the priest. He puts the cup down. He strides a step nearer and looks at his face.]

PRIEST!—Priest!—— What is that look in your eyes?

FIRST PRIEST

O King, I know not. I have given the message of the gods.

[The KING continues to search out his face.]

KING

I mistrust it.

FIRST PRIEST

It is the message of the gods.

KING

I will drink of the other cup!

[The KING steps back to his place in the front of his throne where the Nubian stands beside him. He takes the cup upon the Nubian's right. He gazes at the priest. He looks round at the Ambassador, but

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

sees nothing in that watchful, expressionless face.

He glances sidelong at the priest, then drinks, draining the cup at some length. He puts it down in silence. The face of the Ambassador and the whole bulk of the Nubian remain motionless.]

KING

An inestimable wine!

AMBASSADOR

It is the Emperor's joy.

KING

Send for my Questioners.

[There are weird whistles. Two dark men run on in loin clothes.]

Ask these two priests the Seven Questions.

[The QUESTIONERS run nimbly up to the two priests and lead them away by the arm.]

THE TWO ACOLYTES

O, O, O! O, O!

[They show extreme horror. The AMBASSADOR bows to the King.]

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING

You do not leave us at once?

AMBASSADOR

I go back to the Emperor, whom it is happiness to obey, and length of days.

[He bows and walks away. The HERALD marches out, then the AMBASSADOR; the PAGE, the DWARF and the NUBIAN follow.]

Exeunt.

The HERALD is heard blowing upon his trumpet the same notes as when he entered, one merry bar of music.

The tray and two precious cups, one empty and the other full, are left glittering near the KING.]

KING *[looking at cups]*

Those are rare emeralds that glisten there!
Yet an evil gift. *[To the moaning acolytes.]*
Be silent! Your priests sinned strangely.

[The acolytes continue to moan.]

Enter one of the QUESTIONERS. He has sweat on his face and his hair has become damp and unkempt.]

QUESTIONER

We have asked the Seven Questions.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING

Well?

QUESTIONER

They have not answered.

KING

Not answered!

QUESTIONER

Neither man has confessed.

KING

Oho! Do I keep Questioners that bring me no answers?

QUESTIONERS

We questioned them to the uttermost.

KING

And neither man confessed?

QUESTIONER

They would not confess.

KING

Ask them the Supreme Question.

[The acolytes break out into renewed moaning.]

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

QUESTIONER

It shall be asked, O King.

[*Exit QUESTIONER. The acolytes moan on.*]

KING

They would have made me drink of a poisoned cup. I say there is poison in that cup. Your priests would have had me drink it. [*The acolytes only answer by moan.*] Bid them confess. Bid them confess their crime and why it was done, and the Supreme Question shall be spared them. [*The acolytes only answer by moans.*] Strange! They have done strangely. [*To acolytes.*] Why has your priest spoken falsely? [*The acolytes only moan.*] Why has he spoken falsely in the name of the gods? [*The acolytes moan on.*] Be silent! Be silent! May I not question whom I will? [*To himself.*] They prophesied falsely in the name of the gods.

[*Enter the QUESTIONERS.*]

FIRST QUESTIONER

The Supreme Question is asked.

[*The acolytes suddenly cease moaning.*]

KING

Well?

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

FIRST QUESTIONER

They would not answer.

KING

They would not answer the Supreme Question?

FIRST QUESTIONER

They spoke at last, but they would not answer the question. They would not confess.

KING

What said they at last?

FIRST QUESTIONER

O, the King's Majesty, they but spake idly

KING

What said they?

FIRST QUESTIONER

O, the King's Majesty, they said nought fitting.

KING

They muttered so that no man heard them clearly?

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

FIRST QUESTIONER

They spake. But it was not fitting.

KING

Did they speak of small things happening long ago?

FIRST QUESTIONER

O, the King's Majesty, it was not fitting.

KING

What said they? Speak!

FIRST QUESTIONER

The man you gave to me, O King, said: "No man that knew the counsels of the gods, who alone see future things, would say the gods advised King Hamaran ill when they bade him drink out of a poisoned cup." Then I put the question straightly and he died.

KING

The gods! He said it was the gods! . . .
And the other?

SECOND QUESTIONER

He also said the same, O the King's Majesty.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING

Both said the same. They were questioned
in different chambers?

FIRST QUESTIONER

In different chambers, O King. I ques-
tioned mine in the Red Chamber.

KING [*to* SECOND QUESTIONER]

And yours?

SECOND QUESTIONER

In the Chamber of Rats.

KING

Begone!

[*Exeunt* QUESTIONERS.]

So . . . It *was* the gods.

[*The acolytes are crouched upon the
floor. He does not notice them since they
ceased to moan.*]

The gods! With what dark and dreadful
thing have they clouded the future?

Well, I will face it! But what is it? Is it
one of those things a strong man can bear?
Or is it——?

The future is more terrible than the grave,
that has its one secret only.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

No man, he said, could say that the gods had advised me ill when they bade me drink out of a poisoned cup.

What have the gods seen? What dreadful work have they overlooked where Destiny sits alone, making evil years?

The gods, he said, who alone see future things.

Yes, I have known men who never were warned by the gods, and did not drink poison, and came upon evil days, suddenly like a ship upon rocks no mariner knows. Yes, poison to some of *them* would have been very precious.

The gods have warned me and I have not hearkened, and must go on alone: must enter that strange country of the future whose paths are so dark to man . . . to meet a doom there that the gods have seen.

The gods have seen it! How shall I thwart the gods? How fight against the shapers of the hills?

Would that I had been warned. Would I had heeded when they bade me drink of the cup the Ambassador said was poisoned.

[*Far off is heard that merry bar of music
blown by the AMBASSADOR'S HERALD
on his horn.*]

Is it too late?

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

There it stands yet with its green emeralds
winking.

[He clutches it and looks down into it.]

How like to wine it is, which is full of
dreams. It is silent and dreamy like the gods,
whose dreams we are.

Only a moment in their deathless mind:
then the dream passes.

*[He lifts up his arm and drinks it seated
upon his throne with his head back and the
great cup before his face. The audience
begin to wonder when he will put it down.
Still he remains in the attitude of a drinker.
The acolytes begin to peer eagerly. Still
he remains upright with the great cup to his
lips. The acolytes patter away and the
KING is left alone.]*

*Enter the KING'S POLITICIAN hurriedly.
He goes up to the KING and seizes his right
arm and tries to drag the cup away from
his lips, but the KING is rigid and his arm
cannot be moved. He steps back lifting up
his hands.]*

POLITICIAN

Oh-h!

*[Exit. You hear him announcing
solemnly.]*

King Hamaran . . . is dead!

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

[A murmur is heard of men, at first mournful. It grows louder and louder and then breaks into these clear words.]

Zarabardes is King! Zarabardes is King!
Rejoice! Rejoice! Zarabardes is King!
Zarabardes! Zarabardes! Zarabardes!

CURTAIN.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE PRINCE OF ZON.

PRINCE MELIFLOR.

QUEEN ZOOMZOOMARMA.

LADY OOZIZI.

OOMUZ, *a Common Soldier.*

THE GLORY OF XIMENUNG.

THE OVERLORD OF MOOMOOMON.

PRINCE HUZ.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

SCENE I

Time: June.

Scene: In the Palace of Zoorm; the Hall of the Hundred Princes.

The Princes sit at plain oaken tables with pewter mugs before them. They wear bright grass-green cloaks of silk; they might wear circlets of narrow silver with one large hyacinth petal rising from it at intervals of an inch.

OOMUZ, a Common Soldier, huge and squat, with brown skin and dense black beard, stands just inside the doorway, holding a pike, guarding the golden treasure.

The golden treasure lies in a heap three or four feet high near the right back corner.

SENTRIES, also brown-skinned and bearded, carrying pikes, pass and repass outside the great doorway.

THE GLORY OF XIMENUNG

Heigho, Moomoomon.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

THE OVERLORD OF MOOMOOMON
Heigho, Glory of Ximenung.

XIMENUNG

Weary?

MOOMOOMON

Aye, weary.

ANOTHER

Heigho.

PRINCE MELIFLOR [*sympathetically*]
What wearies you?

MOOMOOMON

The idle hours and the idle days. Heigho.

OTHERS

Heigho.

MELIFLOR

Speak not against the idle hours, Moomoomon.

MOOMOOMON

Why then, lord of the sweet lands?

MELIFLOR

Because in idleness are all things, all things good.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

XIMENUNG

Heigho, I am weary of the idle hours.

MOOMOOMON

You would work then?

XIMENUNG

No-o. That is not our destiny.

MELIFLOR

Let us be well contented with our lot. The idle hours are our sacred treasure.

XIMENUNG

Yes, I am well contented, and yet. . . .

MOOMOOMON [*contemplatively*]

And yet. . . .

XIMENUNG

I sometimes dream that were it not for our glorious state, and this tradition of exalted ease, it might, it might be pleasant. . . .

MOOMOOMON

To toil, to labour, to raid the golden hoards.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

XIMENUNG

Yes, Moomoomon.

MELIFLOR

Never! Never!

OTHERS

No. No. No.

ANOTHER

And yet. . . .

MELIFLOR

No, never. We should lose our glorious ease, the heritage that none may question.

XIMENUNG

What heritage is that, Prince Meliflor?

MELIFLOR

It is all the earth. To labour is to lose it.

MOOMOOMON

If we could toil we should gain some spot of earth that our labour would seem to make our own. How happily the workers come home at evening.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MELIFLOR

It would be to lose all.

PRINCE OF ZOON

How lose it, Meliflor?

MELIFLOR

To us alone the idle hours are given. The sky, the fields, the woods, the summer winds are for us alone. All others put the earth to uses. This or that field has this or that use; here one may go and another may not. They have each their bit of earth and become slaves to its purpose. But for us, ah! for us, is all; the gift of the idle hours.

SOME

Hurrah! Hurrah for the idle hours.

ZOON

Heigho. The idle hours weary me.

MELIFLOR

They give us all the earth and sky to contemplate. Both are for us.

MOOMOOMON

True. Let us drink, and speak of the blue sky.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MELIFLOR [*lifting mug.*]

And all our glorious heritage.

XIMENUNG [*putting hand to mug.*]

Aye, it is glorious, and yet. . . .

[Enter the RAIDERS of the Golden Hoard with spears and, in the other hand, leather wallets the size of your fist; these they cast on the heap. Nuggets the size of big filberts escape from some so that the heap is partly leather and partly gold. These wallets should be filled with nuggets of lead, about the size described, not one lump of lead and not sawdust or rags. Nothing destroys illusion on the stage more than a cannon ball falling with a soft pat. They look scowlingly at the Princes.]

Exeunt the RAIDERS. The Princes have scarcely noticed them.]

MELIFLOR

See how they waste the hours.

XIMENUNG

They have brought treasure from the Golden Hoard.

ZOON

Yes, from the Golden Hoard beyond the

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

marshes. I went there once with old brown Oomuz there.

MELIFLOR

Of what avail is it to come back burdened thus? Has not the Queen more wealth than she'll ever need?

MOOMOOMON

Aye, the Queen needs nothing more.

ZOON

How can we know that?

MOOMOOMON

Why not?

ZOON

The Queen obeys old impulses. Her sires are dead. Who knows whence those impulses come? How can we say what they are?

MOOMOOMON

She cannot need more wealth than what is here.

MELIFLOR

No, no, she cannot.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON

She needs more, for she has bidden them go again to the Golden Hoards. Her impulses have demanded it.

MOOMOOMON

Then there is no reason in her impulses.

ZOON

They do not come from reason.

MOOMOOMON

So I said.

ZOON

They come from Fate.

MOOMOOMON

From Fate!

[There is a hush at this. OOMUZ comes nearer and kneels down.]

OOMUZ

O, Masters, Masters. If there be any thing greater, greater than the Queen, speak not of it, Masters, speak not its name.

ZOON

No, Oomuz. We need nothing greater.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

OOMUZ

The name frightened me, Mighty Highness.

ZOON

Yes, yes, Oomuz; there is only the Queen.

MOOMOOMON

No, there is nothing greater than the Queen, and she has no need of anything more than the treasure that he guards there.

OOMUZ

There is one thing more.

MOOMOOMON

More? What is that?

OOMUZ

There is one thing more. The Queen needs one thing more. This has been told us and we know.

MOOMOOMON

What is it?

OOMUZ

How should we know that? None knows the need of the Queen.

[OOMUZ *returns to guard his heap.*]

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON

What think you, Oomuz? What think you is this need of the Queen?

[OOMUZ *shakes his head about three times.* PRINCE OF ZOON *sighs.*]

SEVERAL PRINCES [*together wearily.*]
Heigho.

MELIFLOR

Take comfort in our heritage, illustrious comrades. Come! We will drink to the sun.

SOME

To the sun! To the sun! [*They drink.*]

MELIFLOR

To the golden idle hours! [*He drinks.*]
Let us be worthy, glorious companions, of our exalted calling. Let us enjoy the days of idleness. Sing to us, mighty one of Zoon, as the idle hours go by. Sing us a song.

MOOMOOMON [*idly.*]

Yes, sing to us.

ZOON

As you all know, I can but hum. But I will hum you a song that I heard yesterday;

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

very strange it was; sung in the meadows by two that were not of our people; sung in the evening. I heard it as I loitered home from the meadows beyond the marshes. There is no ease in the song, and yet . . .

MOOMOOMON

Hum it to us.

ZOON

They sang it together, the two that were not of our people.

[He hums a song. They all lift up their heads from their listlessness.]

MELIFLOR [*wonderingly*]

That is a song that is new.

ZOON

Yes, it is new to me.

MELIFLOR

It is like an old song.

ZOON

Yes, perhaps it is old.

MELIFLOR

What is the song?

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON

It tells of love.

THE PRINCES

Ah-h!

[They seem to wake as though young and strong out of sleep. There is a great commotion among them. The sentries outside are utterly unmoved. OOMUZ, without sharing any of the excitement of the Princes, now nods his head solemnly as he had once shaken it.]

MOOMOOMON

Love! It must have been that that I felt that day in the twilight as I came back round the peak of Zing-gee Mountain.

XIMENUNG

You felt it, Moomoomon? Tell us.

MOOMOOMON

All the air seemed gold, seemed gold of a sudden. Through it I saw fair fields, glittering green far down, glimpsed between clumps of the heather. The gold was all about them, yet they shone with their own fair colours. Ah, how can I tell you all I saw? My feet

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

seemed scarce to touch the slope of the mountain; I too seemed one with the golden air in which all things were shining.

XIMENUNG

And this was Love?

MOOMOOMON

I know not. It was some strange new thing. It was strange and new like this song.

MELIFLOR

Perhaps, it was some other strange new thing.

MOOMOOMON

Perhaps. I know not.

ZOON

No. It was Love.

MOOMOOMON

And then that evening in the golden light I knew the purpose of Earth and why all things are.

XIMENUNG

What is the purpose, Moomoomon?

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MOOMOOMON

I know not. I was content. I troubled
not to remember.

ZOON

It was love.

XIMENUNG

Let us love.

OTHERS

Aye.

HUZ

Aye, that is best of all.

MELIFLOR

No, Princes. The best is idleness. Out of
the idle hours all good things come.

HUZ

I will love. That is best.

MELIFLOR

It is like all things, the gift of the idle
hours. The workers never love. Their
fancies are fastened to the work they do, and
do not roam towards love.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ALL

Love! Let us love.

MELIFLOR

We will love in idleness and praise the idle hours.

XIMENUNG

Whom will you love, lord of the shimmering fields?

MELIFLOR

I have but to show myself loitering by lanes in the evening.

XIMENUNG

I too will be there.

MELIFLOR

And when they see me . . .

XIMENUNG

They will see me too . . .

MELIFLOR [*rising*]

Behold me.

XIMENUNG

So I do.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MELIFLOR

Will they look towards you when this is there?

XIMENUNG

Are birch-trees seen at dawn fairer than I?

MELIFLOR

Behold me; not a poplar is straighter, not a flower is fairer. I will loiter along the lanes at evening.

[He draws his sword. XIMENUNG does the same. MOOMOOMON draws his too and places it between them.]

MOOMOOMON

Be at peace. I will go to the lanes, and there need be no quarrel between you, for I. . . .

OTHERS

No, no, no. . . .

HUZ

We will all go.

ANOTHER

We will all love. Hurrah for love.

[They have all risen. They wave their

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

*swords on high, not threatening each other.
Zoon alone has not risen.]*

MOOMOOMON [*to Zoon*]

You do not speak, Prince of Zoon. Will you not love along the idle hours?

ZOON

Yes, yes. I love.

MOOMOOMON

Come then to the lanes to loiter. It draws towards evening. Let us all come to the lanes, where the honeysuckle is hanging.

ZOON

I love not in the lanes,

MOOMOOMON

Not in the lanes? Then . . .!

OTHERS

Not in the lanes?

ZOON

I love her than whom there is no greater on earth—[*Some PRINCES: Ah!*] unless it be that name that frightens Oomuz.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MOOMOOMON

He loves the . . . !

XIMENUNG

The . . .

MELIFLOR

The Queen!

[OOMUZ *nods his head again.*]

ZOON

The Queen.

MOOMOOMON

If the Queen knew such a thing she would
flee from the palace.

ZOON

I would pursue.

MOOMOOMON

She would go by Aether Mountain, where
her mother went once before her.

ZOON

I would follow.

HUZ

We would all follow.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MELIFLOR

I would follow too. I would dance after her down the little street: the bright heels of my shoes would twinkle: my cloak would float out behind me: I would pursue her and call her name, beyond the street and over the moor as far as Aether Mountain: but I would not come up with her: that would be *too* daring.

ZOON

Love is not a toy, Prince Meliflor. Love is no less than a mood of Destiny.

MELIFLOR

Pooh! We must enjoy the idle hours that are for us alone.

ZOON

There will be no idle hours on Aether Mountain, following from crag to crag; if it be true that she would go that way.

MOOMOOMON

It is true. They know it. They say her mother went that way before. It is one of the royal impulses.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON

Oömuz, did the mother of the Queen go
once up Aether Mountain?

OOMUZ

Aye, and *her* mother.

ZOON

It is true.

XIMENUNG

You are sure of this?

OOMUZ

We know it. It has been said.

HUZ

We will all follow her up Aether Mountain.

MELIFLOR

We will follow merrily.

XIMENUNG

If we did this what would they do when
we returned?

MELIFLOR

Who?

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

XIMENUNG

They.

MELIFLOR

They? They would not dare to speak to
us.

XIMENUNG

Who knows what they would dare if we
dared go after the Queen?

MOOMOOMON

They would dare nothing, knowing whence
we come.

XIMENUNG

They care not whence we come.

MOOMOOMON

But they care for the event that is in our
hands. They dare never touch us because
of the event.

MELIFLOR

We are the heirs of the idle hours. For
them is work. Surely they dare not leave
their work to touch us.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MOOMOOMON

They care only for the event. Because it is prophesied that we are needed for the event we are sacred. Were it not for the event, why . . .

MELIFLOR

Were it not for the event we might not dare to do it; but, being sacred, let us enjoy our idle hours.

XIMENUNG

What if the event should one day befall?

MELIFLOR

It was prophesied long ago and has not come. It will not come for a long time.

MOOMOOMON

No, not for a long time.

[A sentry passes.]

MELIFLOR

So we will follow the Queen.

HUZ

Yes, we will follow.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MOOMOOMON

We shall be a merry company.

MELIFLOR

Splendid to see.

ZOON

I would follow though I were not guarded for the event. Though the event should befall and we be immune no longer, still I should dare it.

MELIFLOR

I would dare it if I knew what they would do. But knowing not . . .

MOOMOOMON

What matter? We are guarded by the event.

ZOON

I say I care not.

MELIFLOR

Let us drum with our heels and beat with our scabbards against the benches so that we frighten the Queen. She will run from the palace then, and we will go after her with all our merry company.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MOOMOOMON

Yes, let us drum all together. I will give the word. All together and she will run from the palace. We will go after and our cloaks will stream behind us.

HUZ

Brave! And our scabbards will show bright beneath them.

MELIFLOR

No. I will give the word. When she flees from the palace I will follow her first. Crowd not about my cloak as it streams in the wind. We must throw up our heels as we run to make our shoes twinkle. We must show gaily in the little street. Afterwards we can run more easily.

HUZ

Aye, in the street we must run beautifully.

MOOMOOMON

I think that I should give the word when we rattle our scabbards and all drum with our heels; but I waive the point. But I do not think that the Queen can run far. She has never left the palace. How could she run

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

over the moor as far as Aether Mountain?
She will faint at the end of the street and we
shall come up with her and bow and offer
her our assistance.

MELIFLOR

Good, good. It would be cold and rocky
on Aether Mountain.

MOOMOOMON

The Queen could never go there over the
moor.

HUZ

No, she is too dainty.

XIMENUNG

They say she could.

MELIFLOR

They; what do they know? Common
workers. What should they know of queens?

XIMENUNG

They have the old prophecies that came
over the fields from the dawn.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MELIFLOR

Yet they cannot understand the Queen.

XIMENUNG

They say her mother went there.

MELIFLOR

That was long ago. Women are quite different now.

XIMENUNG

Well, give the word.

MELIFLOR

Nay. You shall give the word, Moomoomon. When you raise your hand we will all drum with our heels together and rattle our scabbards together, and frighten the Queen.

MOOMOOMON

I honour your courtesy, lord of the deep meadows.

MELIFLOR

We are ready then. When you raise your hand——

[A gust of laughter is heard off, from a far part of the palace.]

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MOOMOOMON

Hark! Hark!

MELIFLOR

It is the Queen! She laughed.

HUZ

Could she have guessed . . .?

MOOMOOMON

I trust not.

MELIFLOR

She—she—cannot have been thinking of
us.

MOOMOOMON

She—she—seldom laughs.

HUZ

What can it be?

MOOMOOMON

Perhaps it was nothing and yet . . .

MELIFLOR

Yet it makes me uneasy.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MOOMOOMON

It is not that I fear, but, when a queen laughs—it makes a feeling in the palace—as though all were not well.

HUZ

It makes one have forebodings. One cannot help it.

MELIFLOR

Perhaps; perhaps later we could return to our gallant scheme; for the present I think I'll hide a while.

MOOMOOMON

Yes, let us hide.

MELIFLOR

So that if there be anything wrong in the palace it will not find us.

[Exeunt MOOMOOMON and MELIFLOR.]

HUZ

Let us hide.

[Exeunt all but ZOON and OOMUZ.]

ZOON has sat always with bent head at table. He sits so, still.]

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON [*bitterly*]

They would follow the Queen.

OOMUZ

Mighty Highness——

ZOON [*still to himself*]

They will come back boasting that they dared follow the Queen.

OOMUZ

Mighty Highness.

ZOON

Yes, good Oomuz.

OOMUZ

In other times once princes followed a queen and came back boasting. Master, the workers were angry. Be warned, Master, because you and I went together once to the hoard beyond the marshes. Be warned. They were angry, Master.

ZOON

I care not for the workers.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

OOMUZ

Master, be warned. It was long ago and they say they were very angry.

ZOON

I care not, Oomuz. I come not boasting back from the hills under Aether Mountain. I shall not halt till I have told the Queen my love. I shall wed with her who is less only than Fate, if less she be. I am not as those, Oomuz. Who weds the Queen is more than the servant of Fate.

OOMUZ

Master——

[He stretches out his hands towards ZOON imploringly.]

ZOON

Well, Oomuz?

OOMUZ

Master. There is a doom about the Queen.

ZOON

What doom, Oomuz?

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

OOMUZ

We know not, Master. We are simple people and we know not that. But we know from of old there is a doom about her. We know it, Master; we have been told from of old.

ZOON

Yes, there could well be a doom about the Queen.

OOMUZ

Follow not after, Master, when she goes to Aether Mountain. There is surely a doom about her. A doom was with her mother upon that very peak.

ZOON

Yes, Oomuz, a doom well becomes her.

OOMUZ

Doubt it not, Master; there is a doom about her.

ZOON

Oomuz, I doubt not. For there is something wonderful about the Queen, beyond all earthly wonders. Something like thunder beyond far clouds or hail hurling from heaven;

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

there should be indeed a terrible doom about her.

OOMUZ

Master, I have warned you for the sake of the days when we raided the golden hoard beyond the marshes.

ZOON [*taking his hand*]

Thank you, good Oomuz.

[*He goes towards door after the others.*]

OOMUZ

But where go you, Master?

ZOON

I wait to follow the Queen when she goes to Aether Mountain.

[*Exit. OOMUZ weeps silently on to the Queen's Treasure.*]

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

The Palace of Zoorm: the Hall of Queen Zoomzoomarma.

Time: Same as Scene I.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

THE QUEEN

Is none worthy to kiss my hand, Oozizi;
none?

LADY OOZIZI

Lady, none.

[*The QUEEN sighs.*]

You should not sigh, great lady.

QUEEN

Why should I not sigh, Oozizi?

OOZIZI

Great lady, because such things as sighs
pertain only to love.

QUEEN

Love is a joy, Oozizi; love is a glow. Love
makes them dance so lightly along ray of the
sunlight. It is made of sunlight and gladness.
It is like flowers in twilight. How should
they sigh?

OOZIZI

Lady! Great lady! Say not such things
of love!

QUEEN

Say not such things, Oozizi? Are they not
true?

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Oozizi

True? Yes, great lady, true. But love is a toy of the humble; love is a common thing that the lowly use; love is. . . . Great lady, had any overheard you speaking then they might have thought, they might have madly dreamed . . .

QUEEN

Dreamed what, Oozizi?

Oozizi

Incredible things.

QUEEN [*meditatively*]

I must not love, Oozizi.

Oozizi

Lady! The common people love.

[*She points to door.*]

Lady, the green fields going from here to the blueness, and bending towards it, and going wandering on, and the rivers they meet and the woods that shade the rivers, all own you for their sovereign. Lady, a million lime-trees mellow your realm. The golden hoards are yours. Yours are the deep fields and the iris marshes. Yours are the roads of wander-

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ing and all ways home. The common delights
of love your mere soldiers know. Lady,
you may not love.

[*The QUEEN sighs. Oozizi continues
her knitting.*]

QUEEN

My mother loved, Oozizi.

Oozizi

Lady, for a day. For one day, mighty lady.
As one might stoop in idleness to a broken
toy and pick it up and throw it again away,
so she loved for a day. That idle fancy of an
afternoon tarnished no pinnacle that shone
from her exalted station. But to love for
more than a day—[*QUEEN's face lights up*]
—that were to place your high unequalled glory
below a vulgar pastime. One alone may sit
in the golden palace to reign over the green
fields; but all may love.

QUEEN

Do all love but I, Oozizi?

Oozizi

Wondrous many, lady.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

How know you, Oozizi?

Oozizi

The common shouts that come up at evening, the clamour of the lanes; they are but from love.

QUEEN

What is love, Oozizi?

Oozizi

Love is a foolish thing.

QUEEN

How know you, Oozizi?

Oozizi

They came tittering to me once; but I saw the foolishness of it.

QUEEN [*a little sadly*]

And they came no more?

Oozizi [*a little sadly too*]

No more.

[*Both look thoughtfully out into dreams,*
the QUEEN on her throne, chin on hand.]

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

*Suddenly a stir is heard from the Hall
of the Hundred Princes.]*

QUEEN [*alarmed*]

Hark! What was that?

OOZIZI [*rises, listening anxiously*]

It sounded . . . to come from the Hall
. . . of the Hundred Princes.

QUEEN

They were never heard here before.

OOZIZI

Lady, never.

QUEEN [*anxiously*]

What can it mean?

OOZIZI

I know not, lady.

QUEEN

Sound never troubled our inner chamber
before.

OOZIZI

All is quiet now.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

Hark! [*They listen.*]

Oozizi

All is quiet.

QUEEN

Sound from beyond our wall, Oozizi. How it disturbs. I could not rule over the green fields if sounds came up to me from the further halls full of their strange thoughts. Why do sounds come to me, Oozizi?

Oozizi

Great lady, it has never been before. It will never be again. You must forget it, lady. You must not let it disturb your reign.

QUEEN

It brought strange thoughts with it, Oozizi.

Oozizi

All is quiet now.

QUEEN

If it came again . . .

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

OOZIZI

Lady, it will not come again. It will come no more. It is quiet.

QUEEN

If it came again . . . Is the door open, Oozizi? Yes . . . If it came again I should almost flee from the palace.

OOZIZI

Lady! Think not of leaving the golden palace!

QUEEN

If it came again.

OOZIZI

It will not come again.

[*The heels of the Princes drum louder, off.*]

QUEEN

Again, Oozizi.

[*OOZIZI pants. The QUEEN waits, listening, in fear. Again the heels are heard.*

The QUEEN runs to the small door. She looks out.]

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Oozizi

Lady! Lady!

QUEEN

Oozizi.

Oozizi

Lady! Lady! You must never leave the palace. You must never leave it. You must not.

QUEEN

Hark, it is quiet now.

Oozizi

Lady, it would be terrible to leave the golden palace. Who would reign? What would happen?

QUEEN

It is quiet now. What would happen, Oozizi?

Oozizi

The world would end.

QUEEN

It is quiet now; perhaps I need not fly.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

OOZIZI

Lady, you must not.

QUEEN

And yet I would fain go over those green fields all gleaming with summer, and see the golden hoards that no man guards, glittering with such a light as glows this June.

OOZIZI

O, speak not, great lady, of the green fields and June. It is these that have intoxicated the Princes so that they do this unrecorded thing, letting sound of them be heard in your sacred room.

QUEEN

Has June intoxicated them, Oozizi?

OOZIZI

O, lady, speak not of June.

QUEEN

Is June so terrible?

[*She returns towards* OOZIZI.]

OOZIZI

It does strange things.

[*The noise breaks out again.*]

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Hark!

[*The QUEEN runs to the door again.
OOZIZI stretches out her arms to the
QUEEN.*]

O, lady, never leave the golden palace.

[*The QUEEN listens; all is silent; she
looks outside.*]

QUEEN

I see the green fields gleaming. Strange
flowers are standing among them, like princes
I have not known.

OOZIZI

O, lady, speak not of the bewildering fields.
They are all enchanted with Summer, and
they have maddened the Princes. It is
dangerous to look at them, lady.

[*The QUEEN gazes on over the fields.*]
And yet you look.

QUEEN

I would fain go far over the strange soft
fields; far and far to the high heathery lands

OOZIZI

Lady, all is quiet; there is no danger; you
must not leave the palace.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

Yes, all is quiet.

[*The QUEEN returns.*]

Oozizi

It was a passing madness seized the Princes.

QUEEN

Oozizi, when I hear the sound of all their feet it is dreadful, and I must fly. And when I see the wonderful fields in the sunlight sloping away to lands I have never known, then I long to fly away and away for ever, passing from field to field and land to land.

Oozizi

Lady, no, no!

QUEEN

Oozizi.

Oozizi

Yes, great lady.

QUEEN

There is a mountain there that towers above the earth. It goes up into a calm of which our world knows nothing. Heaven, like a cloak, is draped about its shoulders.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Why have none told me of this mountain,
Oozizi?

Oozizi [*awed*]

Aether Mountain.

QUEEN

Why has none told me?

Oozizi

When your glorious mother, lady, loved
for a day . . .

QUEEN

Yes, Oozizi . . .

Oozizi

She went, as all songs tell, to Aether
Mountain.

QUEEN [*entranced*]

To Aether Mountain?

Oozizi

So they sing at evening, when they throw
down their loads of gold and rest.

QUEEN

To Aether Mountain.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Oozizi

Lady, Destiny sent her; but you must not go. You must not leave your throne to go to Aether Mountain.

QUEEN

There is a calm upon it not of earth.

Oozizi

You must not go, lady, you must not go.

QUEEN

I will not go.

[The Princes drum again, still louder with their heels.]

Hark!

[Oozizi is frightened. The QUEEN runs to the door.]

It is louder! They are nearer! They are coming here!

Oozizi

No, lady. They would not dare!

QUEEN

I must go, Oozizi; I must go.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Oozizi

No, lady. They will never dare. You must not. Hark! They come no nearer. June has maddened them, but they come no nearer. They are quiet now. Come back, lady. Leave the door, they come no nearer. See, it is all quiet now. They come no nearer, lady. [Oozizi catches her by the sleeve.] Lady, you must not.

QUEEN [*much calmer, gazing away*]

Oozizi, I must go.

Oozizi

No, no, lady! All is quiet; you must not go.

QUEEN [*calmly*]

It is calling for me, Oozizi.

Oozizi

What is calling, lady? Nothing calls.

QUEEN

It is calling, Oozizi.

Oozizi

O, lady, all is silent. No one calls.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

It is calling for me now, Oozizi.

Oozizi

No, no, lady. What calls?

QUEEN

Aether Mountain is calling. I know now who called my mother. It was Aether Mountain, Oozizi; he is calling.

Oozizi

I—I scarce dare look out of the golden palace, lady, to where we must not go. Yet, yet I will look. [*She peers.*] Yes, yes, indeed; there stands old Aether Mountain. But he does not call. Indeed he does not call. He is all silent in Heaven.

QUEEN

It is his voice, Oozizi.

Oozizi

What, lady? I hear no voice.

QUEEN

That great, great silence is his voice, Oozizi. He is calling me out of that blue waste of Heaven.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Oozizi

Lady, I cannot understand.

QUEEN

He calls, Oozizi.

Oozizi

Come away, lady. It is bad to look so long. Oh, if the Princes had not made their clamour heard! Oh, if they had not you had not gone to the door and seen Aether Mountain, and this trouble had not come. O! O! O!

QUEEN

There is no trouble upon Aether Mountain.

Oozizi

O, lady, it is terrible that you should leave the palace.

QUEEN

There is no trouble there. Aether Mountain goes all calm into Heaven. His grey-blue slopes are calm as the sky about him. There he stands calling. He is calling to me, Oozizi.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

OOZIZI [*reflecting*]

Can it be?

QUEEN

What would you ask, Oozizi?

OOZIZI

Can it be that it is with you, great lady, as it was with the Queen, your mother, when Destiny sent her hence to Aether Mountain?

QUEEN

Aether Mountain calls.

OOZIZI

Lady, for a moment hear me. Come with me but a little while.

[*She leads the QUEEN slowly by the arm back to the throne.*]

Lady, be seated here once more and take up the orb and sceptre in your small hands as of old.

[*The QUEEN patiently does as she is told.*]

Now, if Destiny calls you, let him call to you as to a Queen. Now, if it be for no whim of those that pass, that you would go so far from here to that great mountain, say, seated

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

upon your throne in the golden palace with
sceptre and orb in hand, say would you go
forth, lady?

QUEEN [*almost dreaming*]

Aether Mountain calls.

[OOZIZI *bursts into tears. She helps the QUEEN by the arm from her throne and leads her part of the way to the door. There she stops. The QUEEN goes on to the door alone.*]

OOZIZI

Farewell, lady.

[*The QUEEN gazes out rapturously towards Aether Mountain. Then she walks back and embraces Oozizi.*]

QUEEN

Farewell, Oozizi.

OOZIZI

Farewell, great lady.

[*The QUEEN turns, then suddenly she runs swiftly and nimbly through the door and disappears.*]

At once there is a murmur of voices from the Hall of the Hundred Princes.]

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

VOICES [*off*]

Ah, ah, ah.

[OOZIZI *stands still weeping.*

Enter the Princes, exquisite and frivolous. They crowd past each other.]

MELIFLOR

And where is our little Queen?

[OOZIZI *answers with a defiant look through her tears, which has its effect on them.*]

MOOMOOMON [*foppishly*]

There, there.

XIMENUNG

Gone!

MELIFLOR

Come! Let us follow.

MOOMOOMON

Shall we?

SEVERAL

Yes.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

MOOMOOMON

Come.

[They stream across from the side door R. to the door in back, OOZIZI regarding them haughtily.]

OOZIZI *[menacingly]*

It is Aether Mountain.

[Entranced, silent, last of all ZOON follows. Exeunt all the Princes.]

Sounds as of rough protest heard from the workers off. The grim brown heads of two or three peer round the door by which the Princes entered. Many come on, dumb, puzzled, turning their brown heads, searching. At last they cluster round OOZIZI. "Er"? they say.]

OOZIZI

Aether Mountain has called her.

[They nod dumb heads gravely.]

CURTAIN.

SCENE III

On the base of Aether Mountain.

Right, heather sloping up to left, which is rugged with tumbled grey rocks.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Further left all the scene is filled with the rising bulk of Aether Mountain.

Low down, far off and small in the background to the right appears a little palace of pure gold.

Enter right the QUEEN running untired and nimble, unchecked by those grey rocks.

Following her the tired PRINCES come.

ZOON is no longer last, but about fourth, and gaining.

MELIFLOR leads.

MELIFLOR

Permit me, great lady. My hand over the rocks. Permit . . .

[He falls and cannot rise.]

MOOMOOMON

Permit me. *[He falls too.]* These rocks; it is these rocks.

XIMENUNG *[going wearily]*

Great lady. A moment. One moment, great lady. Allow me.

[But ZOON does not speak. Exeunt L. the Queen and those Princes that have not

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

fallen. The curtain falls on stragglers crossing the stage.]

CURTAIN.

SCENE IV

The Summit.

On the snow on the pinnacle of Aether Mountain, with only bright blue sky all round and everywhere, recline QUEEN ZOOMZOOMARMA and the PRINCE OF ZOON.

THE QUEEN

You had known no love before, First of a Hundred?

PRINCE OF ZOON

There is no love on earth, O Queen of all.

QUEEN

Only here.

ZOON

Pure love is only here on this peak lonely in heaven.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

Would you love me elsewhere if we went from here?

ZOON

But we will never go from here.

QUEEN

No, we will never leave it.

ZOON

Lady, look down. [*She looks.*] The earth is sorrowful. [*She sighs.*] Cares. Cares. All over the wide surface we can see are troubles; troubles far off and grey, that harm not Aether Mountain.

QUEEN

It looks a long way off and long ago.

ZOON [*wonderingly*]

Only to-day we came to Aether Mountain.

QUEEN

Only to-day?

ZOON

We crossed a gulf of time.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

It lies below us, all drowsy with years.

ZOON

Lady, here is your home, this peak that has entered heaven. Let us never leave your home.

QUEEN

I knew not until to-day of Aether Mountain. None had told me.

ZOON

Knew you never, lady, of love?

QUEEN

None had told me.

ZOON

This is your home; not Earth; no golden palace. Reign here alone, not knowing the cares of men, without yesterday or to-morrow, untroubled by history or council.

QUEEN

Yes, yes, we will return no more.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON

See, lady, see the Earth. Is it not as a dream just faded?

QUEEN

It is dim indeed, grey and dream-like.

ZOON

It is the Earth we knew.

QUEEN

It is all dream-like.

ZOON

It is gone; we can dimly see it.

QUEEN

Was it a dream?

ZOON

Perhaps. It is gone now and does not matter.

QUEEN

Poor Earth. I hope it was real.

ZOON [*seizing her hand*]

O, Zoomzoomarma, say not you hope that Earth was real. It is gone now. See;

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

it is so far away. Sigh not for Earth, O lady,
sigh not for Earth.

QUEEN

Why not, King of Aether Mountain?

ZOON

Because when you sigh for tiny things I
tremble for your love. See how faint and
small it is and how far away.

QUEEN

I do not sigh for Earth, King of the Mountain. I only wish it well.

ZOON

O, wish it not well, lady.

QUEEN

Let us wish the poor Earth well.

ZOON

No, lady, no. Be with me always wholly,
living not partly in dreams. There is no
Earth. It is but a dream that left us. See,
see [*pointing down*], it is a dim dream.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN [*looking down*]

The people move there still. See, there is Prince Ximenung. Something down there seems almost unlike dreams.

ZOON

No, lady, it cannot be.

QUEEN

How know you, Lord of the Mountain?

ZOON

It was too unreal for life. Love was not there. Surely it was a dream.

QUEEN

Yes, I knew not love in the golden palace of Zoorm.

ZOON

Then indeed it was unreal, Golden Lady. Forget the dream of Earth.

QUEEN

If love be real . . .

ZOON

Can you doubt it?

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

No. It was a dream. Just now I dreamt it. Are dreams bad, my Prince?

ZOON

No. They are just dreams.

QUEEN

We will think of dreams no more.

ZOON

This is where love is, and here only. We should not dream too much or think of dreams, because the place is holy.

QUEEN

Is love here only, darling?

ZOON

Here only, Golden Queen. Do any others elsewhere love as we.

QUEEN

No, I think not.

ZOON

Then how can pure love be elsewhere:

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

It is true.

ZOON

On this clear peak that just enters Heaven
love is and only here. The rest is dreams.

QUEEN

Could we awake from love and find Earth
true?

ZOON

No, no, no. Sweet Lady, let not such
fancies alarm you.

QUEEN

And yet folks wake from dreams. It would
be terrible.

ZOON

No, no, there are things too real for dreams.
You cannot waken from love. Dreams are of
fantastic things, things fanciful and weak,
and things confused and intricate like Earth.
When you think of them in your dreams you
see their unreality. But if love were not real
what could there be to wake to.

QUEEN

True. How wise you are. It was but a
fancy that troubled me. [*Looking down.*]

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

It was one of those dreams at dawn. It is faint and far-off now.

ZOON

Will you love me for ever, Golden Queen?

QUEEN

For ever. Why not? You will love me for ever?

ZOON

For ever. I cannot help it.

QUEEN

Let us look at the dream far off, in the dimness our thoughts have forsaken.

ZOON

Aye, let us look. It was a sad dream somewhat; and yet upon this peak where all is love all that we see seems happy.

QUEEN

See the dream there. Look at those. They seem to walk dreamily as they walk in the dream.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON

It is because they have not love, which is only here.

QUEEN

Look! Look at those dreamers in the dream.

ZOON

They are running.

QUEEN

O! Look!

ZOON

They are pursued.

QUEEN

The brown ones are pursuing them with spears.

ZOON

It is Prince Meliflor, Prince Moomoomon, Prince Ximenung that run in the dream. And the Prince of Huz. The brown men are close.

QUEEN

The brown ones are overtaking them.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON

Yes, they are closer.

QUEEN

Look! Prince Ximenung!

ZOON

Yes, he is dead in the dream.

QUEEN

The Prince of Huz?

ZOON

Speared.

QUEEN

Still, still they are killing them.

ZOON

It is all the Hundred Princes.

QUEEN

They are killing them all.

ZOON

A sad sight once.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

Once?

ZOON

I should have wept once.

QUEEN

It is so far off now.

ZOON

It is so far, far off. We can only feel joy upon this holy mountain.

QUEEN

Only joy. [*He sighs as he looks.*] Look!
[*He sighs again.*]

ZOON

There falls the poor Prince Meliflor.

QUEEN

How huge a thrust it was with the great spear.

ZOON

He is dead.

QUEEN

Are you not happy?

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON

Yes.

QUEEN

In your voice there seemed to sound some far-off thing. Some strange thing. Was it sorrow?

ZOON

No; we are too high; sorrow cannot come. No grief can touch us here, no woe drift up to us from the woes of Earth.

QUEEN

I thought there was some strange thing in your voice, like sorrows we have dreamed.

ZOON

No, Golden Queen. Those fancied sorrows of dreams cannot touch reality.

QUEEN

You will never be sorry we have woken and left the dream of Earth?

ZOON

No, glorious lady; nothing can bring me trouble ever again.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

Not even I?

ZOON

Never you, my Golden Zoomzoomarma,
for on this sacred peak where there is only
love you cannot.

QUEEN

We will dwell here for ever in endless joy.

ZOON [*looking down*]

All dead now, all the Princes.

QUEEN

Turn, my Prince, from the dream of Earth,
lest trouble come up from it.

ZOON

It cannot drift up here; yet we will turn
from the dream.

QUEEN

Let us think of endless joy upon the edge
of heaven.

ZOON

Yes, Queen; for ever in reality while all
else dream away.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

It is the years that make them drowsy.
They dream to dream the years away. Time
cannot reach so high as here, the years are
far below us.

ZOON

Far below us, making a dream and
troubling it.

QUEEN

They do not know in the dream that only
love is real.

ZOON

If time could reach us here we should pass,
too. Nothing is real where time is.

QUEEN

How shall we spend the calm that time does
not vex, together here for ever?

ZOON

Holding your hand. [*She gives it.*] And
kissing it often in the calm of eternity. Some-
times watching, a moment, the dream go
by; then kissing your hand again all in
eternity.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

And never wearying?

ZOON

Not while eternity lingers here in heaven.

QUEEN

Thus we will live until the dream goes by
and Earth has faded under Aether Mountain.

ZOON

And then we shall watch the calm of
Eternity.

QUEEN

And you will still kiss my hand at times.

ZOON

Yes, while eternity wiles Heaven away.

QUEEN

The silence is like music on Aether Mountain.

ZOON

It is because all is real. In the dream
nothing was real. Music had to be made and
then soon passed trembling away. Here all

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

things always are as the desire of Earth,
Earth's desire that groped among fantasies
finding them false.

QUEEN

Let us forget the dream.

ZOON [*kissing her hand*]

I have forgotten for ever.

QUEEN

Ah!

ZOON

What trouble has drifted up to you from
Earth?

QUEEN

An old saying.

ZOON

It was said in the dream.

QUEEN

It was true!

[*She snatches her hand away.*]

Ah, I remember it. It was true.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON

All is unreal but love, my crownéd Zoom-zoomarma. Where there was not love it cannot have been true.

[He tries to take her hand again.]

QUEEN

Touch not my hand. It was true.

ZOON

What was the saying heard in the dream of Earth that was true?

QUEEN

None is worthy to touch my hand; no, none

ZOON

By Aether Mountain, I will kiss your hand again! What is this saying out of a dream that dares deny reality?

QUEEN

It is true! O, it is true!

ZOON

Out of that hurried, aimless dream, that knows not its own end even, you have brought me a saying and say it against love.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN

I say it is true!

ZOON

Nothing is true against love. Fate only is greater.

QUEEN

Then it is Fate.

ZOON

Against Fate I will kiss your hand again.

QUEEN

None are worthy. No, none.

[She draws her rapier.]

ZOON

I will kiss your hand again.

QUEEN

It must be this [*pointing with rapier*] for none are worthy.

ZOON

Though it be death I kiss your hand again.

QUEEN

It is certain death.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON

O, Zoomzoomarma, forget that troubled dream, and things said by dreamers, while I kiss your hand in heaven if only once again.

QUEEN

None are worthy. It is death. None are worthy. None.

ZOON

Though it be death, yet once again upon Aether Mountain in heaven I kiss your hand.

QUEEN

Away! It is death. Upon the word of a Queen.

ZOON

I kiss your h . . .

[She standing kills him kneeling. He falls off Aether Mountain, behind it out of sight.]

As he falls he calls her name after intervals. She kneels upon the summit and watches him falling, falling, falling.

Fainter and fainter as he falls from that tremendous height comes up her name as he calls it.]

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Zoomzoomarma! Zoomzoomarma! Zoom-zoomarma!

[Still she is watching and he is falling still.

At last when his cry of ZOOMZOOMARMA comes almost unheard to that incredible height and then is heard no more, she turns, and with infinite neatness picking up her skirts steps down daintily over the snow.

She is going Earthward as the curtain falls.]

CURTAIN

CHEEZO

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SLADDER, *a successful man.*

SPLURGE, *his secretary and publicity agent.*

THE REV. CHARLES HIPPANTHIGH.

BUTLER.

MRS. SLADDER.

ERMYNTRUDE SLADDER.

CHEEZO

SCENE

The big house that SLADDER has bought in the country. SLADDER'S study. Large French window opening on to a lawn.

Time: Now.

SLADDER'S daughter is seated in an arm-chair tapping on the arm of it a little impatiently.

The door opens very cautiously, and the head of MRS. SLADDER is put round it.

MRS. SLADDER

O, Ermyntrude. Whatever are you doing here?

ERMYNTRUDE

I wanted to speak to father, mother.

MRS. SLADDER

But you mustn't come in here. We mustn't disturb father.

CHEEZO

ERMYNTRUDE

I want to speak to father.

MRS. SLADDER

Whatever about, Ermyntrude?

ERMYNTRUDE [*Taps the arm of the chair*]

O, nothing, mother. Only about that idea of his.

MRS. SLADDER

What idea, child?

ERMYNTRUDE

O, that idea he had, that—er—I was some day to marry a duke.

MRS. SLADDER

And why shouldn't you marry a duke, child? I am sure father would make it worth his while.

ERMYNTRUDE

O well, I don't think I want to, mother.

MRS. SLADDER

But why not, Ermyntrude?

CHEEZO

ERMYNTRUDE

O well, you know Mr. Jones——

MRS. SLADDER

That good man!

ERMYNTRUDE

——did say that dukes were no good, mother. They oppress the poor, I think he said.

MRS. SLADDER

Very true.

ERMYNTRUDE

Well, there you are.

MRS. SLADDER

Yes, yes, of course. At the same time, father had rather set his heart on it. You wouldn't have any other reason now, child, would you?

ERMYNTRUDE

What more do you want, mother? Mr. Jones is a Cabinet Minister; he must know what he's talking about.

CHEEZO

MRS. SLADDER

Yes, yes.

ERMYNTRUDE

And I hear he's going to get a peerage.

MRS. SLADDER [*With enthusiasm*]

Well, I'm sure he deserves it. But child, you mustn't talk to father to-day. You mustn't stay here any longer.

ERMYNTRUDE

But why not, mother?

MRS. SLADDER

Well, child, he's been smoking one of those big cigars again, and he's absent-like. And he's been talking a good deal with Mr. Splurge. It's one of his great days, I think, Ermyntrude. I feel sure it is. One of those days that has given us all this money, and all these fine houses, with all those little birds that his gentlemen friends shoot. He has an idea!

ERMYNTRUDE

O, mother, do you really think so?

CHEEZO

MRS. SLADDER

I'm sure of it, child. [*Looking out.*] There! There he is! Walking along that path that they made. I can see he's got an idea. How like Napoleon.¹ He's walking with Mr. Splurge. They're coming in now. Come along, Ermyntrode, we mustn't disturb him to-day. He has some great idea, some great idea.

ERMYNTRUDE

How splendid, mother! What do you think it is?

MRS. SLADDER

Ah. I could never explain it to you, even if I knew. It is business, child, business. It isn't everybody that can understand business.

ERMYNTRUDE

I hear them coming, mother.

MRS. SLADDER

There must be things we can never understand: things too deep for us like. And business is the most wonderful of them all.

[*Exeunt R.*]

N. B.—SLADDER is not in the very least like Napoleon.

CHEEZO

Enter SLADDER and SPLURGE through the window, which opens on to the lawn, down a step or two.]

SLADDER

Now, Splurge, we must do some business.

SPLURGE

Yes, sir.

SLADDER

Sit down, Splurge.

SPLURGE

Thank you, sir.

SLADDER

Splurge, I am going to say to you now, what I couldn't talk about with all those gardeners hanging about. And, by the way, Splurge, haven't we bought rather too many gardeners?

SPLURGE

No, sir. The Earl of Etheldune has seven; we had to go one better than him, sir.

SLADDER

Certainly, Splurge, certainly.

CHEEZO

SPLURGE

So I bought ten for you sir, to be on the safe side.

SLADDER

Ah, quite right, Splurge, quite right. There seemed to be rather a lot, but that's quite right. Well, now to business.

SPLURGE

Yes, sir.

SLADDER

I told you I'd invented a new name for a food.

SPLURGE

Yes, sir. Cheezo.

SLADDER

Well, what have you been able to do about it?

SPLURGE

I've had some nice little posters done, sir. I'm having it well written up. I've got some samples here, and it looks like doing very well indeed.

CHEEZO

SLADDER

Ah

SPLURGE

It's a grand name, if I may say so, sir. It sounds so classical-like with that "O" at the end; and yet anyone can see what it's derived from, even if he's never learnt anything. It suggests cheese to them every time.

SLADDER

Let's see your samples.

SPLURGE

Well, sir, here's one. [*Brings paper from pocket. Reads.*] "What is Cheezo? Go where you may, speak with whom you will, the same question confronts you. Cheezo is the great new——"

SLADDER

No, Splurge. Cut that question bit. We must have no admission on our part that there's anyone who doesn't know what Cheezo is. Cut it.

SPLURGE

You're quite right, sir; you're quite right. That's a weak bit. I'll cut it. [*He scratches*

CHEEZO

it out. Reads.] "Cheezo is the great new food. It builds up body and brain."

SLADDER

That's good.

SPLURGE

"There is a hundred times more lactic fluid in an ounce of Cheezo than in a gallon of milk."

SLADDER

What's lactic fluid, Splurge?

SPLURGE

I don't know, sir, but it's good stuff all right. It's the right thing to have in it. It's a good man that I got to write this.

SLADDER

All right. Go on.

SPLURGE

"Cheezo makes darling baby grow."

SLADDER

Good. Very good. Very good indeed, Splurge.

CHEEZO

SPLURGE

Yes, I think that catches them, sir.

SLADDER

Go on.

SPLURGE

"Cheezo. The only food."

SLADDER

"The only food?" I don't like that.

SPLURGE

It will go down all right, sir, so long as the posters are big enough.

SLADDER

Go down all right! I wasn't fool enough to suppose that it wouldn't go *down* all right. What are posters for if the public doesn't believe them? Of course it will go *down* all right.

SPLURGE

O, I beg your pardon, sir. Then what don't you quite like about it?

SLADDER

I might invent another food one of these days, and then where should we be?

CHEEZO

SPLURGE

I hadn't thought of that, sir.

SLADDER

Out with it.

SPLURGE [*Scratches with pencil*]

"Cheezo is made out of the purest milk from purest English cows."

SLADDER

Y-e-s, y-e-s. I don't say you're wrong. I don't say you're exactly wrong. But in business, Splurge, you want to keep more to generalities. Talk about the bonds that bind the Empire, talk about the Union Jack, talk by all means about the purity of the English cow; but definite statements you know, definite statements——

SPLURGE

O, yes, I know, sir; but the police never interfere with anything one puts on a poster. It would be bad for business, a jury would never convict, and——

SLADDER

I didn't say they would; but if some interfering ass were to write to the papers

CHEEZO

to say that Cheezo wasn't made from milk, we should have to go to the expense of buying a dozen cows, and photographing them, and one thing and another. [*He gets up and goes to cupboard.*] Now, look here. I quite understand what you say, purity and all that and a very good point too, but you look at this.

[He unrolls a huge poster representing a dairymaid smirking in deadly earnest. On it is printed: "WON'T YOU HAVE SOME?" and on another part of the poster "CHEEZO FOR PURITY."]

You see. Your whole point's there. We state nothing and we can make the dairymaid as suggestive as we like.

SPLURGE

Yes, sir, that is excellent. Quite splendid.

SLADDER

They shall look at that on every road and railway, where it enters every town in England. I'll have it on the cliffs of Dover. It shall be the first thing they see when they come back home, and the last thing for them to remember when they leave England. I'll have it everywhere. I'll rub their noses in it.

CHEEZO

And then, Splurge, they'll ask for Cheezo when they want cheese, and that will mean I shall have the monopoly of all the cheese in the world.

SPLURGE

You're a great man, sir.

SLADDER

I'll be a greater one, Splurge. I'm not past work yet. What more have you got?

SPLURGE

I've rather a nice little poster being done, sir. A boy and a girl looking at one another with a rather knowing look. There's a large query mark all over the girl's dress. Then over the top in big letters I've put: "What is the secret?" and in smaller letters: "I've got a bit of Cheezo." It *makes* people look at it, the children's faces are so wicked.

SLADDER

Good, Splurge. Very good. I'll have that one. I'll rub their noses in that one.

SPLURGE

Then I've got some things for the Press. [Reads.] She: "Darling." He: "Yes, wifcy."

CHEEZO

She: "You won't forget, darling?" He: "No, wifey." She: "You won't forget to bring me some of that excellent Cheezo, so nutritious, so nice for darling baby, to be had at all grocers; but be sure that you find the name of Sladder on their well-known pink wrappers." He: "Certainly, wifey." Just the usual thing, sir, of course; only I have a very good little picture to go with it, very suggestive indeed; I've made all the arrangements with the Press and the bill-posters, sir. I think we'll make a big thing of it, sir.

SLADDER

Well, Splurge, nothing remains to be done now, except to make the Cheezo.

SPLURGE

How do you think of doing it, sir?

SLADDER

Do you know how they kill pigs in Chicago? No, you've not travelled yet. Well, they get their pigs on a slide, one man cuts their throats as fast as they go by, another shaves their bristles, and so on and so on; one man for each job, and all at it at once; they do it very expeditiously. Well, there's

CHEEZO

an interfering fellow sent there by the Government (we wouldn't stand him in England), and if a pig has a sign of tuberculosis on him he won't let that pig go down. Now you'd think that pig was wasted. He isn't. He goes into soap. Now, Splurge, how many cakes of soap were used in the world last year?

SPLURGE [*Getting up*]

Last year? I don't think we have the figures in for last year yet, sir.

[*He goes to bookshelf*]

SLADDER

Well, the year before will do.

SPLURGE [*Taking book and turning pages*]

The figures are given, I think, sir, from the 1st of March to the 1st of March.

SLADDER

That will do.

SPLURGE

Ah, here it is, sir. Soap statistics for the twelve months ending 1st of March this year. A hundred and four million users,

CHEEZO

using on an average twenty cakes each per year. Then there are partial users, and occasional users. The total would be about twenty-one hundred million, sir.

SLADDER

Pure waste, Splurge, all pure waste.

SPLURGE

Waste, sir?

SLADDER

Pure waste. What do you suppose becomes of all that soap, all that good fat? Proteids, I think they call 'em. And proteids are *good* for you, Splurge.

SPLURGE

What *becomes* of them, sir? They're used up.

SLADDER

No, Splurge. They disappear, I grant you. They float away. But they're still there Splurge, they're still there. All that good fat is somewhere.

SPLURGE

But—but, sir—but—In the drains, sir?

CHIEEZO

SLADDER

All those million of cakes of soap. There must be tons of it, Splurge. And we'll *get* it.

SPLURGE

You are a wonderful man, sir.

SLADDER

O, I've a few brains, Splurge. That anyone might have. But I use mine, that's all. There's cleverer people than me in the world——

SPLURGE

No, sir.

SLADDER

O, yes, there are. Lots of them. But they're damned fools. And why? 'Cause they don't use their brains. They mess about learning Greek. Greek! Can you believe it? What good does Greek ever do them? . . . But the money's not made yet, Splurge.

SPLURGE

I'm having it well advertised, sir.

SLADDER

Not so fast. What if they won't eat it?

CHEEZO

SPLURGE

O, they'll eat it all right when it's advertised, sir. They eat everything that's advertised.

SLADDER

What if they can't eat it, Splurge?

SPLURGE

Can't, sir?

SLADDER

Send for my daughter.

SPLURGE

Yes, sir. [*He rises and goes to the door.*]

SLADDER

The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of some damned place. A million of money will be won or lost in this house in five minutes.

SPLURGE

In this house, sir?

SLADDER

Yes, in Ermyntrude's sitting-room. Send for her.

CHEEZO

SPLURGE

Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Miss Sladder! Miss Sladder!

ERMYNTRUDE [*off*]

Yes, Mr. Splurge.

SPLURGE

Would you come to the study, miss, Mr. Sladder wants to speak to you.

ERMYNTRUDE

O, yes, Mr. Splurge.

SLADDER

The test! The test!

[*Re-enter* SPLURGE.]

SPLURGE

Miss Sladder is coming, sir.

SLADDER

The test!

[*Enter* ERMYNTRUDE.]

ERMYNTRUDE

What is it, father?

CHEEZO

SLADDER

How are your white mice, child?

ERMYNTRUDE

Quite well, father, both of them.

SLADDER

[Draws a box from his pocket, takes out a little bit of cheese]

Give them that, Ermyntrude.

ERMYNTRUDE

That, father. What is it?

SLADDER

Cheese.

ERMYNTRUDE

May I have a bit?

SLADDER

No, don't touch it!

ERMYNTRUDE

Very well, father.

SLADDER

If they eat it, you shall have——

CHEEZO

ERMYNTRUDE

What, father?

SLADDER

Anything, everything. Only go and give them the cheese.

ERMYNTRUDE

All right, father.

[She moves to the door R., she looks round, then goes out by the French window instead.]

SLADDER

Why are you going that way, child?

ERMYNTRUDE

O—er—I thought it would be nice to go round over the lawn, father. I can get in by the drawing-room.

SLADDER

O, very well. Be quick, dear.

ERMYNTRUDE

All right, father.

[The magnet that has attracted ERMYNTRUDE to the lawn now appears in the form of MR. HIPANTHIG, passing the window

CHEEZO

on his way to the hall-door. SLADDER and SPLURGE do not see him, having their backs to the window. ERMYNTRUDE looks round now and then to be sure of this. They hold hands longer than is laid down as necessary in books upon etiquette under the head of visiting. She gives him a look of glad and hopeful interrogation but he shakes his head solemnly, and passes gravely on, as one whose errand is no cheerful duty. She looks after him, then goes her way.]

SLADDER

Well, Splurge, we can only wait. [*With emphasis.*] If these mice eat it——

SPLURGE

Yes, sir?

SLADDER

The public will eat it.

SPLURGE

Ah!

SLADDER

Any other business to-day?

CHEEZO

SPLURGE

O, only the cook, sir. He's complaining about the vegetables, sir. He says he's never been anywhere before where they didn't buy them. We get them out of the kitchen garden here, and it seems he doesn't understand it. Says he won't serve a greengrocer, sir.

SLADDER

A kitchen garden is the wrong thing, is it?

SPLURGE

He says so, sir.

SLADDER

But there was one here when we came.

SPLURGE

O, only country people, sir. I suppose they didn't know any better.

SLADDER

Well, where do people grow vegetables, then?

SPLURGE

I asked the cook that, sir, and he said they don't grow them, they buy them.

CHEEZO

SLADDER

O, all right, then. Let him buy them, then. We must do the right thing.

[The hall-door bell rings.]

SLADDER

Hullo! Who's ringing my bell?

SPLURGE

That was the hall-door, wasn't it, sir?

SLADDER

Yes. What are they ringing it for?

[Enter BUTLER.]

BUTLER

Mr. Hippanthigh has called to see you, sir.

SLADDER

Called to see me! What about?

BUTLER

He didn't inform me, sir.

SLADDER

I say, Splurge, have I got to see him?

CHEEZO

SPLURGE

I think so, sir. I think they call on one another like that in the country.

SLADDER

Good lord, whatever for? [*To BUTLER.*]
O, yes. I'll see him, I'll see him.

BUTLER

Very good, sir, I'll inform him so, sir.
[*Exit.*]

SLADDER

I say, Splurge, I suppose I've got to have a butler, and all that, eh?

SPLURGE

O, yes, sir. One at least. It's quite necessary.

SLADDER

You—you couldn't have bought me a cheerfuller one now, could you?

SPLURGE

I'm afraid not, sir. If you were to take all this too light-heartedly, the other land-owners would hardly like it, you know.

CHEEZO

SLADDER

O, well! O, well! What kind of man is this Hippanthigh that's coming?

SPLURGE

He's the man that quarrels with the bishop, sir.

SLADDER

O, the curate. O, yes. I've heard about him. He's been here before, I think. Lawn tennis.

[*Enter BUTLER.*]

BUTLER

Mr. Hippanthigh, sir.

[*Enter HIPPANTHIGH. Exit BUTLER.*]

SLADDER

How do you do, Mr. Hippanthigh? How do you do? Pleased to see you.

HIPPANTHIGH

I wished to speak with you, Mr. Sladder, if you will permit me.

SLADDER

Certainly, Mr. Hippanthigh, certainly. Take a chair.

CHEEZO

HIPPANTHIGH

Thank you, sir. I think I would sooner stand.

SLADDER

Please yourself. Please yourself.

HIPPANTHIGH

I wished to speak, with you alone, sir.

SLADDER

Alone, eh? Alone? [*Aside to SPLURGE.*] It's usual, eh? [*To HIPPANTHIGH.*] Alone, of course, yes. You've come to call, haven't you. [*Exit SPLURGE.*] Can I offer you—er, er—calling's not much in my line, you know—but what I mean is—will you have a bottle of champagne?

HIPPANTHIGH

Mr. Sladder, I've come to speak with you because I believe it to be my duty to do so. I have hesitated to come, but when for particular reasons it became most painful to me to do so, then I knew that it was my clear duty, and I have come.

SLADDER

O, yes, what they call a duty call. O, yes, quite so. Yes, exactly.

CHEEZO

HIPPANTHIGH

Mr. Sladder, many of my parishioners are acquainted with the thing that you sell as bread. [*From the moment of HIPPANTHIGH's entry till now SLADDER, over-cheerful and anxious, has been struggling to do and say the right thing through all the complications of a visit; but now that the note of Business has been sounded he suddenly knows where he is and becomes alert and stern, and all there.*]

SLADDER

What? Virilo?

HIPPANTHIGH

Yes. They pay more for it than they pay for bread, because they've been taught somehow, poor fools, that "they must have the best." They've been made to believe that it makes them, what they call virile, poor fools, and they're growing ill on it. Not so ill that I can prove anything, and the doctor daren't help me.

SLADDER

Are you aware, Mr. Hippanthigh, that if you said in public what you're saying to me, you would go to prison for it, unless you can

CHEEZO

run to the very heavy fine—damages would be enormous.

HIPPANTHIGH

I know that, Mr. Sladder, and so I have come to you as the last hope for my people.

SLADDER

Are you aware, Mr. Hippanthigh, that you are making an attack upon business? I don't say that business is as pure as a surplice. But I do say that in business it is—as you may not understand—get on or go under; and without my business, or the business of the next man, who is doing his best to beat me, what would happen to trade? I don't know what's going to happen to England if you get rid of her trade, Mr. Hippanthigh. . . . Well? . . . When we're broke because we've been doing business with surplices on, what are the other countries going to do, Mr. Hippanthigh? Can you answer me that?

HIPPANTHIGH

No, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER

Ah! So I've got the best of you?

CHEEZO

HIPPANTHIG

Yes, Mr. Sladder. I'm not so clever as you.

SLADDER

Glad you admit the point. As for cleverness it isn't that I've so much of that, but I use what I've got. Well, have you anything more to say?

HIPPANTHIG

Only to appeal to you, Mr. Sladder, on behalf of these poor people.

SLADDER

Why! But you admitted one must have business, and that it can't be run like a tea-party. What more do you want?

HIPPANTHIG

I want you to spare them, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER

Spare them? Spare them? Why, what's the matter with them? I'm not killing them.

HIPPANTHIG

No, Mr. Sladder, you're not killing them. The mortality among children's a bit on the

CHEEZO

high side, but I wouldn't say that was entirely due to your bread. There's a good many minor ailments among the grown-up people, it seems to attack their digestion mostly, one can't trace each case to its source; but their health and their teeth aren't what they were when they had the pure wheaten bread.

SLADDER

But there *is* wheat in my bread, prepared by a special process.

HIPPANTHIGH

Ah! It's that special process that does it, I expect.

SLADDER

Well, they needn't buy it if it isn't good.

HIPPANTHIGH

Ah, they can't help themselves, poor fools; they've been taught to do it from their childhood up. Virilo, Bredo, and Weeto, that are all so much better than bread, it's a choice between these three. Bread is never advertised, or God's good wheat.

SLADDER

Mr. Hippanthigh, if I'm too much of a fool to sell my goods I suffer for it; if they're

CHEEZO

such fools as to buy my Virilo, they suffer for it—that is to say, you say they do—that is a natural law that may be new to you. But why should I suffer more than them? Besides, if I take my Virilo off the market just to oblige you, Mr. Hippanthigh, a little matter of £30,000 a year——

HIPPANTHIGH

I—er——

SLADDER

O, don't mention it. Any little trifle to oblige! But if I did, up would go the sales of Bredo, and Weeto (which have nothing to do with my firm), and your friends wouldn't be any better for that let me tell you, for I happen to know how *they're* made.

HIPPANTHIGH

I am not speaking of the wickedness of others. I come to appeal to you, Mr. Sladder, that for nothing that *you* do, our English race shall lose anything of its ancient strength, in its young men in their prime, or that they should grow infirm a day sooner than God intended, when He planned his course for man.

CHEEZO

ERMYNTRUDE [off]

Father! Father!

[SLADDER *draws himself up, and stands erect to meet the decisive news that he has expected.*

Enter ERMYNTRUDE]

ERMYNTRUDE

Father! The mice have eaten the cheese.

SLADDER

Ah! The public will—— O! [*He has suddenly seen* HIPPANTHIG.]

HIPPANTHIG [*solemnly*]

What new wickedness is this, Mr. Sladder?
[*All stand silent.*] Good-bye, Mr. Sladder.

[*He goes to the door, passing ERMYNTRUDE. He looks at her and sighs as he goes. He passes MRS. SLADDER near the door, and bows in silence.*

[*Exit.*]

ERMYNTRUDE

What have you been saying to Mr. Hippanthigh, father?

CHEEZO

SLADDER

Saying! He's been doing all the saying. He doesn't let you do much saying, does Hippanthigh.

ERMYNTRUDE

But, father. What did he come to see you about?

SLADDER

He came to call your poor old father all kinds of bad names, he did. It seems your old father is a wicked fellow, Ermyntrude.

ERMYNTRUDE

O, father, I'm sure he never meant it.

[HIPANTHIG goes by the window with a mournful face. ERMYNTRUDE runs to the window and watches him till he is out of sight. She quietly waves her hand to HIPANTHIG, unseen by her father.]

SLADDER

O, he meant it all right. He meant it. I'm sorry for that bishop of his that he quarrels with, if he lets him have it the way he went for your poor old father. O, dear me; dear me.

CHEEZO

ERMYNTRUDE

I don't think he quarrels with him, father. I think he only insists that there can be no such thing as eternal punishment. I think that's rather nice of him.

SLADDER

I don't care a damn about eternal punishment one way or the other. But a man who quarrels with the head of his firm's a fool. If his bishop's keen on hell he should push hell for all it's worth.

ERMYNTRUDE

Y-e-s, I suppose he should. But, father, aren't you glad that my mice have eaten the new cheese? I thought you'd be glad, father.

SLADDER

So I am, child. So I am. Only I don't feel quite so glad as I thought I was going to, now. I don't know why. He seems to have stroked me the wrong way somehow.

ERMYNTRUDE

You said you'd give me whatever I liked.

CHEEZO

SLADDER

And so I will, child. So I will. A motor if you like, with chauffeur and footman complete. We can buy anything now, and I wouldn't grudge——

ERMYNTRUDE

I don't want a motor, father.

SLADDER

What would you like to have?

ERMYNTRUDE

O, nothing, father, nothing. Only about that duke, father——

SLADDER

What duke, Ermyntrude?

ERMYNTRUDE

Mother said you wanted me to marry a duke some day, father.

SLADDER

Well?

CHEEZO

ERMYNTRUDE

Well I—er—I don't think I quite want to, father.

SLADDER

Ah! Quite so. Quite so. Quite so. And who *did* you think of marrying?

ERMYNTRUDE

O, father.

SLADDER

Well? [ERMYNTRUDE *is silent.*] When I was his age, I had to work hard for my living.

ERMYNTRUDE

O, father. How do you know what age he is?

SLADDER

O, I guessed he was 82, going to be 83 next birthday. But I daresay I know nothing of the world. I daresay I may have been wrong.

ERMYNTRUDE

O, father, he's young.

SLADDER

Dear me, you don't say so. Dear me, you do surprise me. Well, well, well, well.

CHEEZO

We do live and learn. Don't we? And what might his name be now?

ERMYNTRUDE

It's Mr. Hippanthigh, father.

SLADDER

O-o-o! It's Mr. Hippanthigh, is it? O-ho, O-ho! [*He touches a movable bell, shouting "SPLURGE!" To his daughter or rather to himself.*] We'll see Mr. Hippanthigh.

ERMYNTRUDE

What are you going to do, father?

SLADDER

We'll see Mr. Hippanthigh. [*Enter SPLURGE.*] Splurge, run after Mr. Hippanthigh and bring him back. Say I've got something to say to him. He's gone that way. Quick!

SPLURGE

Yes, sir.

[*Exit.*]

SLADDER

I've got something to say to *him* this time.

CHEEZO

ERMYNTRUDE

Father! What are you going to do?

SLADDER

I'm going to give him What For.

ERMYNTRUDE

But why, father?

SLADDER

Because he's been giving it to your poor old father.

ERMYNTRUDE

Father——

SLADDER

Well?

ERMYNTRUDE

Be kind to him, father.

SLADDER

O, *I'll* be kind to him. I'll be *kind* to him.
Just you wait. I'll be *kind* to him!

ERMYNTRUDE

But you wouldn't send him away, father.
Father, for my sake you wouldn't do that?

CHEEZO

SLADDER

O, we haven't *come* to that yet.

ERMYNTRUDE

But, but—you've sent for him.

SLADDER

O, I've sent for him to give him What
For. We'll come to the rest later.

ERMYNTRUDE

But, when you do come to it, father?

SLADDER

Why, when we do come to it, if the young
man's any good, I'll not stand in my daughter's way——

ERMYNTRUDE

O, thank you, father.

SLADDER

And if he's no good [*firmly*] I'll protect
my child from him.

ERMYNTRUDE

But, father, I don't want to be protected.

CHEEZO

SLADDER

If a man's a man, he must be some good at something. Well, this man's chosen the clergyman job. I've nothing against the job, it's well enough paid at the top, but is this young man ever going to get there? Is he ever going to get off the bottom rung? How long has he been a curate?

ERMYNTRUDE

Eight years, father.

SLADDER

It's a long time.

ERMYNTRUDE

But, father, he would get a vicarage if it wasn't for the bishop. The bishop stands in his way. It isn't nice of him.

SLADDER

If I'd quarrelled with the head of my firm when I was his age, you wouldn't be getting proposals from a curate; no such luck. The dustman would have been more in your line.

CHEEZO

ERMYNTRUDE

But, father, he doesn't quarrel with the bishop. His conscience doesn't let him believe in eternal punishment, and so he speaks straight out. I do admire him so for it. He knows that if he was silent he'd have had a good living long ago.

SLADDER

The wife of the head of my firm believed in spirit rapping. Did I go and tell her what an old fool she was? No, I brought her messages from another world as regular as a postman.

[Steps are heard outside the window.]

SLADDER

Run along, my dear, now.

ERMYNTRUDE

Very well, father.

SLADDER

The man that's going to look after my daughter must be able to look after himself. Otherwise *I* will, till a better man comes.

[Exit ERMYNTRUDE. HIPANTHIGH and SPLURGE appear at the window.]

CHEEZO

HIPPANTHIGH *enters and SPLURGE moves away.*]

HIPPANTHIGH

You sent for me, Mr. Sladder?

SLADDER

Y-e-s—y-e-s. Take a chair. Now, Mr. Hippanthigh, I haven't often been told off the way you told me off.

HIPPANTHIGH

I felt it to be my duty, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER

Yes, quite so. Exactly. Well, it seems I'm a thoroughly bad old man, only fit to rob the poor, an out-and-out old ruffian.

HIPPANTHIGH

I never said that.

SLADDER

No. But you made me feel it. I never felt so bad about myself before, not as bad as that. But you, Mr. Hippanthigh, you were the high-falutin' angel with a new brass halo, out on its bank holiday. Now, how

CHEEZO

would clandestine love-making strike you, Mr. Hippanthigh? Would that be all right to your way of thinking?

HIPPANTHIGH

Clandestine, Mr. Sladder? I hardly understand you.

SLADDER

I understand that you have been making love to my daughter.

HIPPANTHIGH

I admit it.

SLADDER

Well, I haven't heard you say anything about it to me before. Did you tell her mother?

HIPPANTHIGH

Er—no.

SLADDER

Perhaps you told me. Very likely I've forgotten it.

HIPPANTHIGH

No.

CHEEZO

SLADDER

Well, who *did* you tell?

HIPPANTHIGH

We—we hadn't told anyone yet.

SLADDER

Well, I think clandestine's the word for it, Mr. Hippanthigh. I haven't had time in my life to bother about the exact meanings of words or any nonsense of that sort, but I think clandestine's about the word for it.

HIPPANTHIGH

It's a hard word, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER

May be. And who began using hard words? You came here and made me out a pickpocket, just because I use a few tasty little posters which sell my goods, and all the while you're trying on the sly to take a poor old man's daughter away from him. Well, Mr. Hippanthigh?

HIPPANTHIGH

I—I never looked at it in that light before, Mr. Sladder. I never thought of it in that

CHEEZO

way. You have made me feel ashamed [*he lowers his head*], ashamed.

SLADDER

Aha! Aha! I thought I would. Now you know what it's like when you make people ashamed of themselves. You don't like it when they do it to you. Aha! [SLADDER *is immensely pleased with himself.*]

HIPPANTHIGH

Mr. Sladder, I spoke to you as my conscience demanded, and you have shown me that I have done wrong in not speaking sooner about our engagement. I would have spoken to you, but I could not say that and the other thing in the same day. I meant to tell you soon;—well, I didn't, and I know it looks bad. I've done wrong and I admit it.

SLADDER

Aha! [*Still hugely pleased.*]

HIPPANTHIGH

But, Mr. Sladder, you would not on that account perhaps spoil your daughter's happiness, and take a terrible revenge on me. You would not withhold your consent to our——

CHEEZO

SLADDER

Wait a moment; we're coming to that. There's some bad animal that I've heard of that lives in France, and when folks attack it it defends itself. I've just been defending myself. I think I've shown you that you're no brand-new extra-gilt angel on the top of a spire.

HIPPANTHIGH

O—I—er—never——

SLADDER

Quite so. Well, now we come on to the other part. Very well. Those lords and people, they marry one another's daughters, because they know they're all no good. They're afraid it will get out like, and spread some of their damned mediæval ideas where they'll do harm. So they keep it in the family like. But we people who have had the sense to look after ourselves, we don't throw our daughters away to any young man that can't look after himself. See?

HIPPANTHIGH

I assure you, Mr. Sladder, I should—
er——

CHEEZO

SLADDER

She's my only daughter, and if any of my grandchildren are going to the workhouse, they'll go to one where the master's salary is high, and they'll go there as master.

HIPPANTHIGH

I am aware, Mr. Sladder, that I have very little money; as you would look at it, very little.

SLADDER

It isn't the amount of money you've got as matters. The question is this: are you a young man as money is any good to? If I died and left you a million, would you know what to do with it? I've met men what wouldn't last more than six weeks on a million. Then they'd starve if nobody gave them another million. I'm not going to give my daughter to one of that sort.

HIPPANTHIGH

I was third in the classical tripos at Cambridge, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER

I don't give a damn for classics; and I don't give a damn for Cambridge; and I

CHEEZO

dont know what a tripos is. But all I can tell you is that if I was fool enough to waste my time with classics, third wouldn't be good enough for me. No, Mr. Hippanthigh, you've chosen the church as your job, and I've nothing to say against your choice; it's a free country, and I've nothing to say against your job; it's well enough paid at the top, only you don't look like getting there. I chose business as my job, there seemed more sense in it; but if I'd chosen the Church, I shouldn't have stuck as a curate. No, nor a bishop either. I wouldn't have had an archbishop ballyragging me and ordering me about. No. I'd have got to the top, and drawn big pay, and *spent* it.

HIPPANTHIGH

But, Mr. Sladder, I could be a vicar tomorrow if my conscience would allow me to cease protesting against a certain point which the bishop holds to be——

SLADDER

I know all about that. I don't care what it is that keeps you on the bottom rung of the ladder. Conscience, you say. Well, it's a different thing with every man. It's con-

CHEEZO

science with some, drink with others, sheer stupidity with most. It's pretty crowded already, that bottom rung, without me going and putting my daughter on it. Where do you suppose I'd be now if I'd let my conscience get in my way? Eh?

HIPPANTHIGH

Mr. Sladder, I cannot alter my beliefs.

SLADDER

Nobody asks you to. I only ask you to leave the bishop alone. He says one thing and you preach another whenever you get half a chance; it's enough to break up any firm.

HIPPANTHIGH

Believing as I do that eternal punishment is incompatible with——

SLADDER

Now, Mr. Hippanthigh, that's got to stop. I don't mind saying, now that I've given you What For, that you don't seem a bad young fellow: but my daughter's not going to marry on the bottom rung, and there's an end of that.

CHEEZO

HIPPANTHIGH

But, Mr. Sladder, can you bring yourself to believe in anything so terrible as eternal punishment, so contrary to——

SLADDER

Me? No.

HIPPANTHIGH

Then, how can you ask me to?

SLADDER

That particular belief never happened to stand between me and the top of the tree. Many things did, but they're all down below me now, Mr. Hippanthigh, way down there [*pointing*] where I can hardly see them. You get off that bottom rung as I did years ago.

HIPPANTHIGH

I cannot go back on all I've said.

SLADDER

I don't want to make it hard for you. Only just say you believe in eternal punishment, and then give up talking about it. You may say it to me if you like. We'll have one other person present so that there's no going

CHEEZO

back on it, my daughter if you like. I'll let the bishop know, and he won't stand in your way any longer, but at present you force his hand. It's you or the rules of the firm.

HIPPANTHIGH

I cannot.

SLADDER

You can't just say to me and my daughter that you believe in eternal punishment, and leave me to go over to Axminster and put it right with the bishop?

HIPPANTHIGH

I cannot say what I do not believe.

SLADDER

Think. The bishop probably doesn't believe it himself. But you've been forcing his hand,—going out of your way to.

HIPPANTHIGH

I cannot say it.

SLADDER [*rising*]

Mr. Hippanthigh, there's two kinds of men, those that succeed, those that don't. I know no other kind. You . . .

CHEEZO

HIPPANTHIGH

I cannot go against my conscience.

SLADDER

I don't care what your reason is. You are the second kind. I am sorry my daughter ever loved a man of that sort. I am sorry a man of that sort ever entered my house. I was a little, dirty, ragged boy. You make me see what I would be to-day if I had been a man of your kind. I would be dirty and ragged still. [*His voice has been rising during this speech.*]

[*Enter* ERMYNTRUDE.]

ERMYNTRUDE

Father! What are you saying, father? I heard such loud voices.

[HIPPANTHIGH *stands silent and mournful.*]

SLADDER

My child, I had foolish ideas for you once, but now I say that you are to marry a man, not a wretched, miserable little curate who will be a wretched, miserable little curate all his life.

CHEEZO

ERMYNTRUDE

Father, I will not hear such words.

SLADDER

I've given him every chance. I've given him more than every chance, but he prefers the bottom rung of the ladder; there we will leave him.

ERMYNTRUDE

O, father! How can you be so cruel?

SLADDER

It's not my fault, and it's not the bishop's fault. It's his own silly pig-headedness.

[He goes back to his chair.]

ERMYNTRUDE *[going up to HIPANTHIGH]*

O, Charlie, couldn't you do what father wants?

HIPANTHIGH

No, no, I cannot. He wants me to go back on things I've said.

[Enter MRS. SLADDER carrying a wire cage, with two dead white mice in it.

Also SPLURGE.]

CHEEZO

MRS. SLADDER

O, the mice have died, John. The mice have died. O, Ermyntitude's poor mice! And father's great idea! Whatever shall we do?

SLADDER

Er? [*Almost a groan.*] Eh? Died have they?

[SLADDER *ages in his chair. You would say he was beaten. Suddenly he tautens up his muscles and stands up straight with shoulders back and clenched hands.*]

So they would beat Sladder, would they? They would beat Sladder. No, that has yet to be done. We'll go on, Splurge. The public shall eat Cheezo. It's a bit strong perhaps. We'll tone it down with bad nuts that they use for the other cheeses. We'll advertise it, and they'll eat it. See to it, Splurge. They don't beat Sladder.

MRS. SLADDER

O, I'm so glad. I'm so glad, John.

HIPPANTHIGH [*suddenly with clear emphasis*]

I THINK I DO BELIEVE IN ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

CHEEZO

SLADDER

Ah! At last. Well, Ermyntrude, is your cruel old parent's blessing any use to you?

[He places one hand on her shoulder and one on HIP PANTHIGH'S.]

MRS. SLADDER

Why, Ermyntrude! Well, I never! And to think of all this happening in one day!

[HIP PANTHIGH is completely beaten. ERMYNTRUDE is smiling at him. He puts an arm round her shoulder in dead silence.]

CURTAIN.

A GOOD BARGAIN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

BROTHER ANTONINUS
BROTHER LUCULLUS SEVERUS
BROTHER GREGORIUS PEDRO
SATAN
SMOGGS

A GOOD BARGAIN

SCENE

A Crypt of a Monastery. BROTHER GREGORIUS PEDRO is seated on a stone bench reading. Behind him is a window.
Enter BROTHER LUCULLUS SEVERUS.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Brother, we may doubt no longer.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Well?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

It is certain. Certain.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

I too had thought so.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

It is clear now, clear as . . . It is certain.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Well, why not? After all, why not?

A GOOD BARGAIN

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

You mean . . . ?

GREGORIUS PEDRO

'Tis but a miracle.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Yes, but . . .

GREGORIUS PEDRO

But you did not think to see one?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

No, no, not that; but Brother Antoninus . . .

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Well, why not he? He is holy as any, fasts as often as any, wears coarser clothing than most of us, and once scourged a woman because she looked at our youngest—scourged her right willingly.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Yet, Brother Antoninus!

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Yet, why not?

A GOOD BARGAIN

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

We knew him, somehow. One does not know the blessed saints of heaven.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

No, no indeed. I never thought to see such a thing on earth; and now, now . . . you say it is certain?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Certain.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Ah, well. It seemed like it, it seemed like it for some days. At first I thought I had looked too long through our eastern window, I thought it was the sun that had dazzled my eyes; and then, then it was clearly something else.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

It is certain now.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS [*sitting beside him, sighs*]

I grudge him nothing.

A GOOD BARGAIN

GREGORIUS PEDRO [*a little heavily*]

No, nor I.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

You are sad, brother.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

No, not sad.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Ah, but I see it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

What grieves you, brother?

GREGORIUS PEDRO [*sighs*]

We shall water the roses no more, he and I.
We shall roll the lawns no more. We shall
tend the young tulips together never again.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Oh, why not? Why not? There is not all
that difference.

A GOOD BARGAIN

GREGORIUS PEDRO

There is.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

It is our cross, brother. We must bear it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Ah, yes. Yes, yes.

[*A bell rings noisily.*]

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

The gate bell, brother! Be of good cheer, it is the gate bell ringing!

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Why should I be of good cheer because the gate bell rings?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Why, brother, the world is at the gate. We shall see someone. It is an event. Someone will come and speak of the great world. Oh, be of good cheer, be of good cheer, brother.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

I think that I am heavy at heart to-day.

[*Enter JOHN SMOGGS.*]

A GOOD BARGAIN

SMOGGS

Ullo, Governor. Is either o' yer the chief monk?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

The Reverend Abbot is not here.

SMOGGS

Ain't, ain't 'e?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

But what do you seek, friend?

SMOGGS

Want to know what you blokes are getting up to.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

We do not understand your angry zeal.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Tell us, friend.

SMOGGS

One o' yer is playing games no end, and we won't 'ave it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Games?

A GOOD BARGAIN

SMOGGS

Well, miracles if you like it better, and we won't 'ave it, nor any of your 'igh church games nor devices.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

What does he say, brother?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Friend, you perplex us. We hoped you would speak to us of the great world, its gauds, its wickedness, its——

SMOGGS

We won't 'ave it. We won't 'ave none of it, that's all.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Tell us, friend, tell us what you mean. Then we will do whatever you ask. And then you shall speak to us of the world.

SMOGGS

There 'e is, there 'e is, the blighter. There 'e is. 'E's coming. O Lord . . .!

[He turns and runs. Exit.]

A GOOD BARGAIN

GREGORIUS PEDRO

It's Antoninus!

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Why, yes; yes, of course!

GREGORIUS PEDRO

He must have seen him over the garden wall.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

We must hush it up.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Hush it up?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

There must be no scandal in the monastery.

[Enter BROTHER ANTONINUS wearing a halo. He walks across and exits.]

[GREGORIUS is gazing with wide eyes.]

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

There must be no scandal in the monastery.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

It has grown indeed!

A GOOD BARGAIN

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Yes, it has grown since yesterday.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

I noticed it dimly just three days ago. I noticed it dimly. But I did not—— I could not guess . . . I never dreamed that it would come to this.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Yes, it has grown for three days.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

It was just a dim light over his head, but now . . . !

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

It flamed up last night.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

There is no mistaking it now.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

There must be *no scandal*.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

No scandal, brother?

A GOOD BARGAIN

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Look how unusual it is. People will talk. You heard what that man said. They will all talk.

GREGORIUS PEDRO [*sadly*]

Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

How could we face it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

It is, yes, yes,—it is unusual.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Nothing like it has happened for many centuries.

GREGORIUS PEDRO [*sadly*]

No, no. I suppose not. Poor Antoninus.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Why could he not have waited?

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Waited? What? Three—three hundred years?

A GOOD BARGAIN

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

Or even five or ten. He is long past sixty.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Yes, yes, it would have been better.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

You saw how ashamed he was.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Poor Antoninus. Yes, yes. Brother, I think if we had not been here he would have come and sat on this bench.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

I think he would. But he was ashamed to come, looking, looking like that.

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Brother, let us go. It is the hour at which he loves to come and sit here, and read in the Little Book of Lesser Devices. Let us go so that he may come here and be alone.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS

As you will, brother; we must help him when we can.

[They rise and go.]

A GOOD BARGAIN

GREGORIUS PEDRO

Poor Antoninus

LUCULLUS SEVERUS [*glancing*]

I think he will come back now.

[*Exeunt. The bare, sandaled foot of ANTONINUS appears as the last heel lifts in the other doorway.*

Enter ANTONINUS rather timidly. He goes to bench and sits. He sighs. He shakes his head to loosen the halo, but in vain. He sighs. Then he opens his book and reads in silence. Silence gives way to mumbles, mumbles to words.]

ANTONINUS

. . . and finally beat down Satan under our feet.

[*Enter SATAN. He has the horns and long hair and beard of a he-goat. His face and voice are such as could have been once in heaven.*]

ANTONINUS [*standing, lifting arm*]

In the name of . . .

SATAN

Banish me not.

A GOOD BARGAIN

ANTONINUS

In the name . . .

SATAN

Say nothing you may regret, until I have spoken.

ANTONINUS

In the . . .

SATAN

Hear me.

ANTONINUS

Well?

SATAN

There fell with me from heaven a rare, rare spirit, the light of whose limbs far outshone dawn and evening.

ANTONINUS

Well?

SATAN

We dwell in darkness.

ANTONINUS

What is that to me?

A GOOD BARGAIN

SATAN

For that rare spirit I would have the gaud
you wear, that emblem, that bright orna-
ment. In return I offer you——

ANTONINUS

Begone——

SATAN

I offer you——

ANTONINUS

Begone.

SATAN

I offer you—Youth.

ANTONINUS

I will not traffic with you in damnation.

SATAN

I do not ask your soul, *only that shining
gaud.*

ANTONINUS

Such things are not for hell.

SATAN

I offer you Youth.

A GOOD BARGAIN

ANTONINUS

I do not need it. Life is a penance and ordained as a tribulation. I have come through by striving. Why should I care to strive again?

SATAN [*smiles*]

Why?

ANTONINUS

Why should I?

SATAN [*laughs, looking through window*]

It's spring, brother, is it not?

ANTONINUS

A time for meditation.

SATAN [*laughs*]

There are girls coming over the hills, brother. Through the green leaves and the May.

[ANTONINUS *draws his scourge from his robe.*]

ANTONINUS

Up! Let me scourge them from our holy place.

SATAN

Wait, brother, they are far off yet. But you would not scourge them, you would

A GOOD BARGAIN

not scourge them, they are so . . . Ah!
one has torn her dress!

ANTONINUS

Ah, let me scourge her!

SATAN

No, no, brother. See, I can see her ankle
through the rent. You would not scourge
her. Your great scourge would break that
little ankle.

ANTONINUS

I will have my scourge ready, if she comes
near our holy place.

SATAN

She is with her comrades. They are
maying. Seven girls. [ANTONINUS *grips his*
scourge.] Her arms are full of may.

ANTONINUS

Speak not of such things. Speak not,
I say.

[SATAN *is leaning leisurely against the*
wall, smiling through the window.]

A GOOD BARGAIN

SATAN

How the leaves are shining. Now she is seated on the grass. They have gathered small flowers, Antoninus, and put them in her hair, a row of primroses.

ANTONINUS [*his eyes go for a moment on to far, far places. Unintentionally.*]

What colour?

SATAN

Black.

ANTONINUS

No, no, no! I did not mean her hair. No, no. I meant the flowers.

SATAN

Yellow, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS [*flurried*]

Ah, of course, yes, yes.

SATAN

Sixteen and seventeen and fifteen, and another of sixteen. All young girls. The age for you, Antoninus, if I make you twenty. Just the age for you.

A GOOD BARGAIN

ANTONINUS

You—you cannot.

SATAN

All things are possible unto me except salvation.

ANTONINUS

How?

SATAN

Give me your gaud. Then meet me at any hour between star-shining and cock-crow under the big cherry tree, when the moon is waning.

ANTONINUS

Never.

SATAN

Ah, Spring, Spring. They are dancing. Such nimble ankles.

[ANTONINUS *raises his scourge.*]

SATAN [*more gravely.*]

Think, Antoninus, forty or fifty more Springs.

ANTONINUS

Never, never, never.

A GOOD BARGAIN

SATAN

And no more striving next time. See Antoninus, see them as they dance, there with the may behind them under the hill.

ANTONINUS

Never! I will not look.

SATAN

Ah, look at them, Antoninus. Their sweet figures. And the warm wind blowing in Spring.

ANTONINUS

Never! My scourge is for such.

[SATAN *sighs*. *The girls laugh from the hill*. ANTONINUS *hears the laughter*.
A look of fear comes over him.]

ANTONINUS

Which . . . [*a little peal of girlish laughter off*.] Which cherry tree did you speak of?

SATAN

This one over the window.

A GOOD BARGAIN

ANTONINUS [*with an effort.*]

It shall be held accursed. I will warn the brethren. It shall be cut down and hewn asunder and they shall burn it utterly.

SATAN [*rather sorrowfully.*]

Ah, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS

You shall not tempt a monk of our blessed order

SATAN

They are coming this way, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS

What! What!

SATAN

Have your scourge ready, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS

Perhaps, perhaps they have not merited extreme chastisement.

SATAN

They have made a garland of may, a long white garland drooped from their little hands. Ah, if you were young, Antoninus.

A GOOD BARGAIN

ANTONINUS

Tempt me not, Satan. I say, tempt me not!

[The girls sing, SATAN smiles, the girls sing on. ANTONINUS tip-toes to seat, back to window, and sits listening. The girls sing on. They pass the window and shake the branch of a cherry tree. The petals fall in sheets past the window. The girls sing on and ANTONINUS sits listening.]

ANTONINUS *[hand to forehead.]*

My head aches. I think it is that song. . . . Perhaps, perhaps it is the halo. Too heavy, too heavy for us.

[SATAN walks gently up and removes it and walks away with the gold disc. ANTONINUS sits silent.]

SATAN

When the moon is waning.

[Exit. More petals fall past the window. The song rings on. ANTONINUS sits quite still, on his face a new ecstasy.]

CURTAIN.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SIR WEBLEY WOOTHERY-JURNIP	} <i>Members</i> <i>of the</i> <i>Olympus</i>
MR. NEEKS	

JERGINs, *an old waiter.*

MR. TRUNDLEBEN, *Secretary of the Club.*

MR. GLEEK, *Editor of the "Banner and Evening Gazette," and member of the Olympus.*

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SCENE

A room in the Olympus Club.

Time: After luncheon.

SIR WEBLEY WOOTHERY-JURNIP *and* MR. NEEKS *sit by a small table. Further away sits* MR. GLEEK, *the Editor of the "Banner and Evening Gazette."* SIR WEBLEY JURNIP *risés and rings the bell by the fire-place. He returns to his seat.*

MR. NEEKS

I see there's a man called Mr. William Shakespeare putting up for the Club.

SIR WEBLEY

Shakespeare? Shakespeare? Shakespeare?
I once knew a man called Shaker.

NEEKS

No, it's Shakespeare—Mr. William Shakespeare.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY

Shakespeare? Shakespeare? Do *you* know anything about him?

NEEKS

Well, I don't exactly recall—I made sure that you——

SIR WEBLEY

The Secretary ought to be more careful. Waiter!

JERGINs

Yes, Sir Webley.

[He comes.]

SIR WEBLEY

Coffee, Jergins. Same as usual.

JERGINs

Yes, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

And, Jergins—there's a man called Mr. William Shakespeare putting up for the Club.

JERGINs

I'm sorry to hear that, Sir Webley.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY

Yes, Jergins. Well, there it is, you see; and I want you to go up and ask Mr. Trundleben if he'd come down.

JERGINs

Certainly, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

And then get my coffee.

JERGINs

Yes, Sir Webley.

[He goes slowly away.]

NEEKs

He'll be able to tell us all about him.

SIR WEBLEY

At the same time he should be more careful.

NEEKs

I'm afraid—I'm afraid he's getting rather, rather old.

SIR WEBLEY

O, I don't know, he was seventy only the other day. I don't call that too old—nowa-

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

days. He can't be now, he can't be more than, let me see, seventy-eight. Where does this Mr. Shaker live?

NEEKS

Shakespeare. Somewhere down in Warwickshire. A village called Bradford, I think, is the address he gives in the Candidates' Book.

SIR WEBLEY

Warwickshire! I do seem to remember something about him now. If he's the same man I certainly do. William Shakespeare, you said.

NEEKS

Yes, that's the name.

SIR WEBLEY

Well, I certainly have heard about him now you mention it.

NEEKS

Really! And what does he do?

SIR WEBLEY

Do? Well, from what I heard he poaches.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

NEEKS

Poaches!

SIR WEBLEY

Yes, a poacher. Trundleben deserves to get the sack for this. A poacher from the wilds of Warwickshire. I heard all about him. He got after the deer at Charlecote.

NEEKS

A poacher!

SIR WEBLEY

That's all he is, a poacher. A member of the Olympus! He'll be dropping in here one fine day with other people's rabbits in his pockets.

[*Enter* JERGINs.]

JERGINs

Your coffee, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

My coffee. I should think so. [*He sips it.*]
One needs it.

JERGINs

Mr. Trundleben will be down at once, Sir Webley. I telephoned up to him.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY

Telephoned! Telephoned! The Club's getting more full of new-fangled devices every day. I remember the time when——
Thank you, Jergins.

[JERGINS *retires.*]

This is a pretty state of things, Neeks.

NEEKS

A pretty state of things indeed, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

Ah, here's Trundleben.

NEEKS

He'll tell us all about it, Sir Webley. I'm sure he'll——

SIR WEBLEY

Ah, Trundleben. Come and sit down here. Come and——

TRUNDLEBEN

Thank you, Sir Webley. I think I will. I don't walk quite as well as I used, and what with——

SIR WEBLEY

What's all this we hear about this Mr. Shakespeare, Trundleben?

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

TRUNDLEBEN

O, ah, well yes, yes indeed. Well, you see, Sir Webley, he was put up for the Club. Mr. Henry put him up.

SIR WEBLEY [*disapprovingly*]

O, Mr. Henry

NEEKS

Yes, yes, yes. Long hair and all that.

SIR WEBLEY

I'm afraid so.

NEEKS

Writes poetry, I believe.

SIR WEBLEY

I'm afraid so.

TRUNDLEBEN

Well then, what does Mr. Newton do but go and second him, and there you are, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

Yes, a pretty state of things. Has he . . . Does he . . . What is he?

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

TRUNDLEBEN

He seems to write, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

O, he does, does he? What does he write?

TRUNDLEBEN

Well, I wrote and asked him that, Sir Webley, and *he* said plays.

SIR WEBLEY

Plays? Plays? Plays? I'm sure I never heard . . . What plays?

TRUNDLEBEN

I asked him that, Sir Webley, and he said . . . he sent me a list [*fumbling*]. Ah, here it is.

[He holds it high, far from his face, tilts his head back and looks down his nose through his glasses.]

He says—let me see—"Hamelt," or "Hamlet," I don't know how he pronounces it. "Hamelt, Hamlet"; he spells it "H-a-m-l-e-t." If you pronounce it the way *one* pronounces handle, it would be "Hamelt," but if——

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLE

What's it all about?

TRUNDLEBEN

Well, I gathered the scene was in Denmark.

NEEKS

Denmark! H'm! another of those neutrals!

SIR WEBLEY

Well, I wouldn't so much mind where the scene of the play was put, if only it was a play one ever had heard of.

NEEKS

But those men who have much to do with neutrals are rather the men—don't you think, Sir Webley?—who . . .

SIR WEBLEY

Who want watching. I believe you're right, Neeks. And that type of unsuccessful playwright is just the kind of man I always rather . . .

NEEKS

That's rather what I feel, Sir Webley.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY

It wouldn't be a bad plan if we told somebody about him.

NEEKS

I think I know just the man, Sir Webley. I'll just drop him a line.

SIR WEBLEY

Yes, and if he's all right there's no harm done, but I always suspect that kind of fellow. Well, what else, Trundleben? This is getting interesting.

TRUNDLEBEN

Well, Sir Webley, it's really very funny, but he sent me a list of the characters in this play of his, "Hamelt," and, and it's really rather delicious——

NEEKS

Yes?

SIR WEBLEY

Yes? What is it?

TRUNDLEBEN

He's got a *ghost* in his play. [*He-he-he-he-he*] A ghost! He really has.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY

What! Not on the stage?

TRUNDLEBEN

Yes, on the stage!

NEEKS

Well, well, well.

SIR WEBLEY

But that's absurd.

TRUNDLEBEN

I met Mr. Vass the other day—it was his four hundredth presentation of “The Nighty”—and I told him about it. He said that bringing a ghost on the stage was, of course—er—ludicrous.

SIR WEBLEY.

What else does he say he's done?

TRUNDLEBEN

Er—er—there's an absurdly long list—er—
“Macbeth.”

SIR WEBLEY

“Macbeth.” That's Irish.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

NEEKS

Ah, yes. Abbey Theatre style of thing.

TRUNDLEBEN

I think I heard he offered it them. But of course——

SIR WEBLEY

No, quite so.

TRUNDLEBEN

I gathered it was all rather a—rather a sordid story.

SIR WEBLEY [*solemnly*]

Ah!

[NEEKS *with equal solemnity wags his head.*]

TRUNDLEBEN [*focussing his list again*]

Here's a very funny one. This is funnier than "Hamlet." "The Tempest." And the stage directions are "The sea, with a ship."

SIR WEBLEY [*laughs*]

O, that's lovely! That's really too good. The sea with a ship! And what's it all about?

. IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

TRUNDLEBEN

Well, I rather gathered that it was about a magician; and he—he makes a storm.

SIR WEBLEY

He makes a storm. Splendid! On the stage, I suppose.

TRUNDLEBEN

O yes, on the stage.

[SIR WEBLEY *and* NEEKS *laugh heartily.*]

NEEKS

He'd . . . He'd have to be a magician for that, wouldn't he?

SIR WEBLEY

Ha, ha! Very good! He'd have to be a magician to do that, Trundleben.

TRUNDLEBEN

Yes, indeed, Sir Webley; indeed he would, Mr. Neeks.

SIR WEBLEY

But that stage direction is priceless. I'd really like to copy that down if you'd let me.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

What is it? "The sea with a ship"? It's the funniest bit of the lot.

TRUNDLEBEN

Yes, that's it, Sir Webley. Wait a moment, I have it here. The—the whole thing is "the sea with a ship, afterwards an island." Very funny indeed.

SIR WEBLEY

"Afterwards an island"! That's very good, too. "Afterwards an island." I'll put that down also. [*He writes.*] And what else, Trundleben? What else?

[TRUNDLEBEN *holds out his list again.*]

TRUNDLEBEN

"The Tragedy of—of King Richard the—the Second."

SIR WEBLEY

But *was* his life a tragedy? *Was* it a tragedy, Neeks?

NEEKS

I—I—well I'm not quite sure; I really don't think so. But I'll look it up.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY

Yes, we can look it up.

TRUNDLEBEN

I think it was rather—perhaps *rather* tragic, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

O, I don't say it wasn't. No doubt. No doubt at all. That's one thing. But to call his whole life a tragedy is—is quite another. What, Neeks?

NEEKS

O, quite another.

TRUNDLEBEN

O, certainly, Sir Webley. Tragedy is—er—is a very strong term indeed, to—to apply to such a case.

SIR WEBLEY

He was probably out poaching when he should have been learning his history.

TRUNDLEBEN

I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY

And what else, eh? Anything more?

TRUNDLEBEN

Well, there are some poems, he says.

[Holds up a list.]

SIR WEBLEY

And what are they about?

TRUNDLEBEN

Well, there's one called . . . O! I'd really rather not mention that one; perhaps that had better be left out altogether.

NEEKS

Not . . . ?

SIR WEBLEY

Not quite . . . ?

TRUNDLEBEN

No, not at all.

SIR WEBLEY and NEEKS

H'm.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

TRUNDLEBEN

Left out altogether. And then there are
"Sonnets," and—and "Venus and Adonis,"
and—and "The Phoenix and the Turtle."

SIR WEBLEY

The Phoenix and the what?

TRUNDLEBEN

The Turtle.

SIR WEBLEY

O! Go on . . .

TRUNDLEBEN

One called "The Passionate Pilgrim,"
another "A Lover's Complaint."

SIR WEBLEY

I think the whole thing's very regrettable.

NEEKS

I think so too, Sir Webley.

TRUNDLEBEN [*mournfully*]

And there've been no poets since poor
Browning died, none at all. It's absurd for
him to call himself a poet.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

NEEKS

Quite so, Trundleben, quite so.

SIR WEBLEY

And all these plays. What does he mean by calling them plays? They've never been acted.

TRUNDLEBEN

Well—er—no, not exactly acted, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

What do you mean by not exactly, Trundleben?

TRUNDLEBEN

Well, I believe they were acted in America, though of course not in London.

SIR WEBLEY

In America? What's that got to do with it. America? Why, that's the other side of the Atlantic.

TRUNDLEBEN

O, yes, Sir Webley, I—I quite agree with you.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY

America! I daresay they did. I daresay they did act them. But that doesn't make him a suitable member for the Olympus. Quite the contrary.

NEEKS

O, quite the contrary.

TRUNDLEBEN

O, certainly, Sir Webley, certainly.

SIR WEBLEY

I daresay "Macbeth" would be the sort of thing that would appeal to Irish Americans. *Just* the sort of thing.

TRUNDLEBEN

Very likely, Sir Webley, I'm sure.

SIR WEBLEY

Their game laws are very lax, I believe, over there; they probably took to him on account of his being a poacher.

TRUNDLEBEN

I've no doubt of it, Sir Webley. Very likely.

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NEEKS

I expect that was just it.

SIR WEBLEY

Well now, Trundleben; are we to ask the Olympus to elect a man who'll come in here with his pockets bulging with rabbits.

NEEKS

Rabbits, and hares too.

SIR WEBLEY

And venison even, if you come to that.

TRUNDLEBEN

Yes indeed, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

Thank God the Olympus can get its haunch of venison without having to go to a man like that for it.

NEEKS

Yes indeed.

TRUNDLEBEN

Indeed I hope so.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBL

Well now, about those plays. I don't say we've absolute proof that the man's entirely hopeless. We must be sure of our ground.

NEEKS

Yes, quite so

TRUNDLEBEN

O, I'm afraid Sir Webley, they're very bad indeed. There are some quite unfortunate—er—references in them.

SIR WEBLEY

So I should have supposed. So I should have supposed.

NEEKS

Yes, yes, of course.

TRUNDLEBEN

For instance, in that play about that funny ship—I have a list of the characters here—and I'm afraid, well—er,—er you see for yourself. [*Hands papers.*] You see that is, I am afraid, in very bad taste, Sir Webley.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY

Certainly, Trundleben, certainly. Very bad indeed.

NEEKS [*peering*]

Er—er, what is it, Sir Webley?

SIR WEBLEY [*pointing*]

That, you see.

NEEKS

A—a drunken butler! But most regrettable.

SIR WEBLEY

A very deserving class. A—a quite gratuitous slight. I don't say you mightn't see one drunken butler . . .

TRUNDLEBEN

Quite so.

NEEKS

Yes, of course.

SIR WEBLEY

But to put it boldly on a programme like that is practically tantamount to implying that all butlers are drunken.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

TRUNDLEBEN

Which is by no means true.

SIR WEBLEY

There would naturally be a protest of some sort, and to have a member of the Olympus mixed up with a controversy like that would be—er—naturally—er—most . . .

TRUNDLEBEN

Yes, of course, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

And then of course, if he does a thing like that once . . .

NEEKS

There are probably other lapses just as deplorable.

TRUNDLEBEN

I haven't gone through his whole list, Sir Webley. I often feel about these modern writers that perhaps the less one looks the less one will find that might be, er . . .

SIR WEBLEY

Yes, quite so.

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NEEKS

That is certainly true.

SIR WEBLEY

Well, we can't wade all through his list of characters to see if they are all suitable to be represented on a stage.

TRUNDLEBEN

O no, Sir Webley, quite impossible; there are—there are—I might say—hundreds of them.

SIR WEBLEY

Good gracious! He must have been wasting his time a great deal.

TRUNDLEBEN

O, a great deal, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

But we shall have to go further into this. We can't have . . .

NEEKS

I see Mr. Gleek sitting over there, Sir Webley.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY

Why, yes, yes, so he is.

NEEKS

The *Banner and Evening Gazette* would know all about him if there's anything to know.

SIR WEBLEY

Yes, of course they would.

NEEKS

If we were to ask him.

SIR WEBLEY

Well, Trundleben, you may leave it to us. Mr. Neeks and I will talk it all over and see what's to be done.

TRUNDLEBEN

Thank you, Sir Webley. I'm really very sorry it all happened—very sorry indeed.

SIR WEBLEY

Very well, Trundleben, we'll see what's to be done. If nothing's known of him and his plays, you'll have to write and request him to

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

withdraw his candidature. But we'll see.
We'll see.

TRUNDLEBEN

Thank you, Sir Webley. I'm sure I'm very sorry it all occurred. Thank you, Mr. Neeks.

[Exit TRUNDLEBEN, waddling slowly away.]

SIR WEBLEY

Well, Neeks, that's what it will have to be. If nothing whatever's known of him we can't have him putting up for the Olympus.

NEEKS

Quite so, Sir Webley. I'll call Mr. Gleek's attention.

[He begins to rise, hopefully looking Gleek-wards, when JERGINs comes between him and MR. GLEEK. He has come to take away the coffee.]

SIR WEBLEY

Times are changing, Jergins.

JERGINs

I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

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SIR WEBLEY

Changing fast, and new members putting
up for the Club.

JERGINs

Yes, I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY

You notice it too, Jergins.

JERGINs

Yes, Sir Webley, it's come all of a sudden.
Only last week I saw . . .

SIR WEBLEY

Well, Jergins.

JERGINs

I saw Lord Pondleburrow wearing a . . .

SIR WEBLEY

Wearing what, Jergins?

JERGINs

Wearing one of those billycock hats, Sir
Webley.

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SIR WEBLEY

Well, well. I suppose they've got to change, but not at that rate.

JERGIN

No, Sir Webley.

[EXIT, *shaking his head as he goes.*]

SIR WEBLEY

Well, we must find out about this fellow.

NEEKS

Yes. I'll call Mr. Gleek's attention. He knows all about that sort of thing.

SIR WEBLEY

Yes, yes. Just . . .

[NEEKS *rises and goes some of the way towards GLEEK'S chair.*]

NEEKS

Er—er——

GLEEK [*looking round*]

Yes?

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY

Do you know anything of a man called
Mr. William Shakespeare?

GLEEK [*looking over his pince-nez.*]

No!

[*He shakes his head several times and
returns to his paper.*]

CURTAIN.

FAME AND THE POET

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

HARRY DE REVES, *a Poet.*

(This name, though of course of French origin, has become anglicised and is pronounced DE REEVS.)

DICK PRATTLE, *a Lieutenant-Major of the Royal Horse Marines.*

FAME.

FAME AND THE POET

SCENE

The Poet's rooms in London. Windows in back. A high screen in a corner.

Time: February 30th.

The POET is sitting at a table writing.

[Enter DICK PRATTLE.]

PRATTLE

Hullo, Harry.

DE REVES

Hullo, Dick. Good Lord, where are you from?

PRATTLE [*casually*]

The ends of the earth.

DE REVES

Well, I'm damned!

PRATTLE

Thought I'd drop in and see how you were getting on.

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES

Well, that's splendid. What are you doing in London?

PRATTLE

Well, I wanted to see if I could get one or two decent ties to wear—you can get nothing out there—then I thought I'd have a look and see how London was getting on.

DE REVES

Splendid! How's everybody?

PRATTLE

All going strong.

DE REVES

That's good.

PRATTLE [*seeing paper and ink*]
But what are you doing?

DE REVES

Writing.

PRATTLE

Writing? I didn't know you wrote.

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES

Yes, I've taken to it rather.

PRATTLE

I say—writing's no good. What do you write?

DE REVES

O, poetry.

PRATTLE

Poetry! Good Lord!

DE REVES

Yes, that sort of thing, you know.

PRATTLE

Good Lord! Do you make any money by it?

DE REVES

No. Hardly any.

PRATTLE

I say—why don't you chuck it?

DE REVES

O, I don't know. Some people seem to like my stuff, rather. That's why I go on.

FAME AND THE POET

PRATTLE

I'd chuck it if there's no money in it.

DE REVES

Ah, but then it's hardly in your line, is it? You'd hardly approve of poetry if there *was* money in it.

PRATTLE

O, I don't say that. If I could make as much by poetry as I can by betting I don't say I wouldn't try the poetry touch, only——

DE REVES

Only what?

PRATTLE

O, I don't know. Only there seems more sense in betting, somehow.

DE REVES

Well, yes. I suppose it's easier to tell what an earthly horse is going to do, than to tell what Pegasus——

PRATTLE

What's Pegasus?

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES

O, the winged horse of poets.

PRATTLE

I say! You don't believe in a winged horse, do you?

DE REVES

In our trade we believe in all fabulous things. They all represent some large truth to us. An emblem like Pegasus is as real a thing to a poet as a Derby winner would be to you.

PRATTLE

I say. (Give me a cigarette. Thanks.) What? Then you'd believe in nymphs and fauns, and Pan, and all those kind of birds?

DE REVES

Yes. Yes. In all of them.

PRATTLE

Good Lord!

DE REVES

You believe in the Lord Mayor of London, don't you?

FAME AND THE POET

PRATTLE

Yes, of course; but what has-

DE REVES

Four million people or so made him Lord Mayor, didn't they? And he represents to them the wealth and dignity and tradition of——

PRATTLE

Yes; but, I say, what has all this——

DE REVES

Well, he stands for an idea to them, and they made him Lord Mayor, and so he is one . . .

PRATTLE

Well, of course he is.

DE REVES

In the same way Pan has been made what he is by millions; by millions to whom he represents world-old traditions.

PRATTLE [*rising from his chair and stepping backwards, laughing and looking at the POET in a kind of assumed wonder*]

I say . . . I say . . . You old heathen . . . but Good Lord . . .

FAME AND THE POET

*[He bumps into the high screen behind,
pushing it back a little.]*

DE REVES

Look out! Look out!

PRATTLE

What? What's the matter?

DE REVES

The screen!

PRATTLE

O, sorry, yes. I'll put it right.

[He is about to go round behind it.]

DE REVES

No, don't go round there.

PRATTLE

What? Why not?

DE REVES

O, you wouldn't understand.

PRATTLE

Wouldn't understand? Why, what have
you got?

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES

O, one of those things. . . . You wouldn't understand.

PRATTLE

Of course I'd understand. Let's have a look.

[The POET walks towards PRATTLE and the screen. He protests no further. PRATTLE looks round the corner of the screen.]

An altar.

DE REVES *[removing the screen altogether]*
That is all. What do you make of it?

[An altar of Greek design, shaped like a pedestal, is revealed. Papers litter the floor all about it.]

PRATTLE

I say—you always were an untidy devil.

DE REVES

Well, what do you make of it?

PRATTLE

It reminds me of your room at Eton.

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES

My room at Eton?

PRATTLE

Yes, you always had papers all over your floor.

DE REVES

O, yes——

PRATTLE

And what are these?

DE REVES

All these are poems; and this is my altar to Fame.

PRATTLE

To Fame?

DE REVES

The same that Homer knew.

PRATTLE

Good Lord!

DE REVES

Keats never saw her. Shelley died too young. She came late at the best of times, now scarcely ever.

FAME AND THE POET

PRATTLE

But, my dear fellow, you don't mean that you think there really is such a person?

DE REVES

I offer all my songs to her.

PRATTLE

But you don't mean you think you could actually *see* Fame?

DE REVES

We poets personify abstract things, and not poets only but sculptors and painters too. All the great things of the world are those abstract things.

PRATTLE

But what I mean is, they're not really there, like you or me.

DE REVES

To us these things are more real than men, they outlive generations, they watch the passing of kingdoms: we go by them like dust; they are still there, unmoved, unsmiling.

FAME AND THE POET

PRATTLE

But, but, you can't think that you could
see Fame, you don't expect to *see* it?

DE REVES

Not to me. Never to me. She of the
golden trumpet and Greek dress will never
appear to me. . . . We all have our dreams.

PRATTLE

I say—what have you been doing all day?

DE REVES

I? O, only writing a sonnet.

PRATTLE

Is it a long one?

DE REVES

Not very.

PRATTLE

About how long is it?

DE REVES

About fourteen lines.

FAME AND THE POET

PRATTLE [*impressively*]

I tell you what it is.

DE REVES

Yes?

PRATTLE

I tell you what. You've been overworking yourself. I once got like that on board the Sandhurst, working for the passing-out exam. I got so bad that I could have seen anything.

DE REVES

Seen anything?

PRATTLE

Lord, yes; horned pigs, snakes with wings; anything; one of your winged horses even. They gave me some stuff called bromide for it. You take a rest.

DE REVES

But my dear fellow, you don't understand at all. I merely said that abstract things are to a poet as near and real and visible as one of your bookmakers or barmaids.

FAME AND THE POET

PRATTLE

I know. You take a rest.

DE REVES

Well, perhaps I will. I'd come with you to that musical comedy you're going to see, only I'm a bit tired after writing this; it's a tedious job. I'll come another night.

PRATTLE

How do you know I'm going to see a musical comedy?

DE REVES

Well, where would you go? *Hamlet's* on at the Lord Chamberlain's. You're not going there.

PRATTLE

Do I look like it?

DE REVES

No.

PRATTLE

Well, you're quite right. I'm going to see "The Girl from Bedlam." So long. I must push off now. It's getting late. You take a

FAME AND THE POET

rest. Don't add another line to that sonnet; fourteen's quite enough. You take a rest. Don't have any dinner to-night, just rest. I was like that once myself. So long.

DE REVES

So long.

[Exit PRATTLE. DE REVES returns to his table and sits down.]

Good old Dick! He's the same as ever. Lord, how time passes.

[He takes his pen and his sonnet and makes a few alterations.]

Well, that's finished. I can't do any more to it.

[He rises and goes to the screen; he draws back part of it and goes up to the altar. He is about to place his sonnet reverently at the foot of the altar amongst his other verses.]

No, I will not put it there. This one is worthy of the altar.

[He places the sonnet upon the altar itself.]

If that sonnet does not give me fame, nothing that I have done before will give it to me, nothing that I ever will do.

[He replaces the screen and returns to

FAME AND THE POET

his chair at the table. Twilight is coming on. He sits with his elbow on the table, his head on his hand, or however the actor pleases.]

Well, well. Fancy seeing Dick again. Well, Dick enjoys his life, so he's no fool. What was that he said? "There's no money in poetry. You'd better chuck it." Ten years' work and what have I to show for it? The admiration of men who care for poetry, and how many of *them* are there? There's a bigger demand for smoked glasses to look at eclipses of the sun. Why should Fame come to me? Haven't I given up my days for her? That is enough to keep her away. I am a poet; that is enough reason for her to slight me. Proud and aloof and cold as marble, what does Fame care for us? Yes, Dick is right. It's a poor game chasing illusions, hunting the intangible, pursuing dreams. Dreams? Why, we are ourselves dreams.

[He leans back in his chair.]

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

[He is silent for a while. Suddenly he lifts his head.]

FAME AND THE POET

My room at Eton, Dick said. An untidy mess.

[As he lifts his head and says these words, twilight gives place to broad daylight, merely as a hint that the author of the play may have been mistaken, and the whole thing may have been no more than a poet's dream.]

So it was, and it's an untidy mess there *[looking at screen]* too. Dick's right. I'll tidy it up. I'll burn the whole damned heap,

[He advances impetuously towards the screen.]

every damned poem that I was ever fool enough to waste my time on.

[He pushes back the screen. FAME in a Greek dress with a long golden trumpet in her hand is seen standing motionless on the altar like a marble goddess.]

So . . . you have come!

[For a while he stands thunderstruck. Then he approaches the altar.]

Divine fair lady, you have come.

[He holds up his hand to her and leads her down from the altar and into the centre of the stage. At whatever moment the actor finds it most convenient, he repossesses himself of the sonnet that he had

FAME AND THE POET

*placed on the altar. He now offers it to
FAME.]*

This is my sonnet. Is it well done?

*[FAME takes it and reads it in silence,
while the POET watches her rapturously.]*

FAME

You're a bit of all right.

DE REVES

What?

FAME

Some poet.

DE REVES

I—I—scarcely . . . understand.

FAME

You're IT.

DE REVES

But . . . it is not possible . . . are you
she that knew Homer?

FAME

Homer? Lord, yes. Blind old bat, 'e
couldn't see a yard.

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES

O Heavens!

[FAME walks beautifully to the window.
She opens it and puts her head out.]

FAME [*in a voice with which a woman in an
upper storey would cry for help if the
house was well alight*]

Hi! Hi! Boys! Hi! Say, folks! Hi!

[*The murmur of a gathering crowd is
heard. FAME blows her trumpet.*]

FAME

Hi, he's a poet! [*Quickly, over her shoulder.*]
What's your name?

DE REVES

De Reves.

FAME

His name's de Reves.

DE REVES

Harry de Reves.

FAME

His pals call him Harry.

FAME AND THE POET

THE CROWD

Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!

FAME

Say, what's your favourite colour?

DE REVES

I . . . I . . . I don't quite understand.

FAME

Well, which do you like best, green or blue.

DE REVES

O—er—blue.

*[She blows her trumpet out of the
window.]*

No—er—I think green.

FAME

Green is his favourite colour.

THE CROWD

Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!

FAME

'Ere, tell us something. They want to
know all about yer.

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES

Wouldn't you perhaps . . . would they
care to hear my sonnet, if you would—er . . .

FAME [*picking up quill*]

Here, what's this?

DE REVES

O, that's my pen.

FAME [*after another blast on her trumpet*]

He writes with a quill.

[*Cheers from the CROWD.*]

FAME [*going to a cupboard*]

Here, what have you got in here?

DE REVES

O . . . er . . . those are my breakfast
things.

FAME [*finding a dirty plate*]

What have yer had on this one?

DE REVES [*mournfully*]

Oh, eggs and bacon.

FAME AND THE POET

FAME [*at the window*]

He has eggs and bacon for breakfast.

THE CROWD

Hip hip hip, *hooray!*

Hip hip hip, *hooray!*

Hip hip hip, *hooray!*

FAME

Hi, and what's this?

DE REVES [*miserably*]

O, a golf stick.

FAME

He's a man's man! He's a virile man!
He's a manly man!

[*Wild cheers from the CROWD, this time
only from women's voices.*]

DE REVES

O, this is terrible. This is terrible. This
is terrible.

[*FAME gives another peal on her horn.
She is about to speak.*]

DE REVES [*solemnly and mournfully*]

One moment, one moment . . .

FAME AND THE POET

FAME

Well, out with it.

DE REVES

For ten years, divine lady, I have worshipped you, offering all my songs . . . I find . . . I find I am not worthy . . .

FAME

O, you're all right.

DE REVES

No, no, I am not worthy. It cannot be. It cannot possibly be. Others deserve you more. I must say it! *I cannot possibly love you.* Others are worthy. You will find others. But I, no, no, no. It cannot be. It cannot be. Oh, pardon me, but it *must* not.

[Meanwhile FAME has been lighting one of his cigarettes. She sits in a comfortable chair, leans right back, and puts her feet right up on the table amongst the poet's papers.]

O, I fear I offend you. But—it cannot be.

FAME

O, that's all right, old bird; no offence. I ain't going to leave you.

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES

But—but—but—I do not understand.

FAME

I've come to stay, I have.

[She blows a puff of smoke through her trumpet.]

CURTAIN.

